

# CHECHNYA IN MY HEART

The Committee of Soldiers'  
Mothers of Russia

The Centre for Peacemaking and  
Community Development

The Observer Mission of Human Rights  
and Public Organizations in the  
Conflict Zone in Chechnya

The OMEGA organisation

The Buddhist Order  
"Nipponzan Myokhodzhi"

Moscow Quaker Group

"Memorial" Society





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**Attention! You may be shocked by some photographs.**



In April 1995 I was working in Samashki in the «group of Kovalev». We slept in a small building belonging to the former kindergarten in the health spa of Sernovodsk, which was turned into a refugee camp at the beginning of the war. The whole yard outside the kindergarten beside which doctor Ruslan Magomadov lived with his family, was overgrown with large thorny acacia trees — the tops of the trees hid the glowing fires of Samashki. If it wasn't for the cannonade and drone of aeroplanes on their way to Bamut, it would have been a totally peaceful, truly health spa-like landscape.

The young daughters of Ruslan and Satsita regularly hassled us — Lord, how this made us glad after the nightmares seen in Samashki!

When I left for home I took with me the longest pods strewn over the acacias and a branch with enormous thorns. Probably the «crown of thorns» was twined from such branches. Back at home my small son Kirill planted a dozen brown seeds broken off from the dry pods in a flower pot. To our surprise, from those dozen seeds from distant Sernovodsk, one small Chechen acacia tree sprouted and is growing up now. When it had only just peeped through the soil, news came of a second «cleansing» of Samashki with the use of heavy artillery and tanks. News came too of the «taking» of Sernovodsk. Of the fact that the very same kindergarten at the health spa no longer existed, nor the acacias...

By profession I am a restorer of museum paintings, and it wasn't very easy for me to adapt from the relatively peaceful Riazan to the barbarism of the Chechen war. Not even a war, but some kind of boundless tyranny, some form of inhuman cop game without morals or laws.

I still don't understand why I, a Russian, was not scared to bathe late in the evenings in the hot open pools at the Sernovodsk health spa, releasing the weariness together with the local screaming boys and Chechens who had gone through the torture pits of the Russian internal forces near the village of Assinovskaya. To speak with them, discuss the methods of interrogation which these villagers with work-weary hands had undergone...

But I know why I really was afraid on passing through our Russian check points in the bright Spring daylight. Why on seeing a troop of the Interior ministry I would check out which tree to jump behind or pit to plunge into «just in case». And to what extent such a jump will help me to stay alive...

But if out of the dozen seeds at least one seed actually would grow into a green and tender small tree, that would mean that not all is lost. It would mean that through the blood and death of an unjust war, the growth of a carefree and fragile life may still break through. Just don't hinder it...

And so at home in Riazan grows a small totally thornless Chechen acacia...

**Victor LOZINSKY**  
**«Memorial», Ryazan**

*Translated by Chris HUNTER*



Anna PIASETSKAYA

*Mother of a dead soldier,*

*Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia*

## "I CRIED FOR THEM ALL..."

The undeclared war in Chechnya started for me on 4 December 1994. My son Nikolai Nikolaevich Piasetsky, who was born in 1974, was called up into the Russian army 24 May 1994. On 4 December he was due to go to the telephone exchange in Riazan, but he did not go. I tried to contact him again by telephone 11 December, but in vain.

I discovered from the newspapers 11 December that the Russian army invasion of Chechnya had begun. I hoped that my son would not be sent to Chechnya. He had just finished training at the Special Air Force centre in Omsk and was sent to military command no.41450 for further service. This is the Riazan regiment of the Tula Division of the Special Air Force. I was glad that he would be serving not far from home and I would be able to see him. I spoke to Kolya by telephone 28 November: he said he had been there for three weeks and had not yet had time to feel at home. He promised to find out when it would be convenient to visit and asked me to arrange a telephone call for him 4 December. This was my last conversation with my son... Much later I discovered that on the following day, 29 November, together with the third battalion of the Riazan regiment, he had been



Valery SOCHKOLDIN



transported by plane to Chechnya. We, parents, were given no official information about this.

No one asked my son whether he agreed to be sent to Chechnya. On 28 November he was making plans to meet his family and friends and on 29 November he was sent to certain death...



PHOTO: NATALIYA MEDVEDEVA

Officials hid the truth from parents. Only on 22 December from unofficial sources we learned that Kolya had been sent for duty in a 'southerly direction'. We immediately wrote to ask: where is our son?

From newspapers I found out that the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia was collecting parcels for young men sent to Chechnya. I was at their headquarters 25 December. They took a parcel for my son. I had still received no official information as to his whereabouts, but I had a premonition. I found out the number of the headquarters of the division and rang every day from 26 December to ask about my son. Right up to 5 January I was regularly given the same answer: he is not among the dead and wounded.

I hoped that he had not taken part in the new year battle. On 5 January I received information from military headquarters that my son Nikolai Piasetsky had been killed in Grozny. For five days I walked around like a shadow unable to eat or drink... I prayed to God for our boys, the thousands of them, who had died on new year's eve. I cried for them all.

But the country was celebrating new year and Christmas. There was merriment everywhere; the triumphal ceremony of laying the foundation stone of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was shown on TV, while all the time blood was flowing in Grozny and the bodies of our children lay on the snowy streets. When Sergei Kovalev appealed to the president to declare a cease-fire, the President decided that it was too early for a cease-fire. He said: 'I am fully in control of the situation, I accept all responsibility'. This answer shocked me. It meant the President knew that thousands of dead soldiers were lying on the streets of Grozny, that dogs and cats were already beginning to eat them and birds to peck at them, and this did not worry the President!

Only on 11 January after the holidays was I able to appeal to the Tula division for the body of my son be returned to me. They told me that my son had disappeared without trace. Again I rang the headquarters and was told to wait: 'all the bodies are being collected in Rostov-on-Don, your son's body will be sent to Moscow'.

I rang again to ask at the military section No. 41450 how my son had died. I discovered that my Kolya was in BMD No.785 which had entered Grozny 1 January and was destroyed.

## CHECHHYA IN MY HEART

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Of the twelve members of the crew only three remained alive. Where this had happened had not been established, the vehicle had not been found. I managed to contact one of the survivors, Seriozha Rodionov. He was recovering from his wounds in Novocherkassk hospital. He said that my Kolya was killed inside the vehicle and that this happened near the railway station. The Russian soldiers did not know the town: they had no maps. On 25 January I found out that the vehicle had been found but that the body of my son was not in it. There was no hope that the body of my son would be brought to Moscow.

This was the end of the first circle of hell. I passed through the second while searching for my son who had disappeared without trace. On 26 January together with a fair-sized group from the BBC I flew to Minvody and then to Nazran. On the first day in Nazran I discovered that a Chechen woman who conveyed the wounded from Grozny to Starye Atagi had Kolya's military card. I hoped that if I could find this woman I would be able to



Valery SCHERKOLDIN

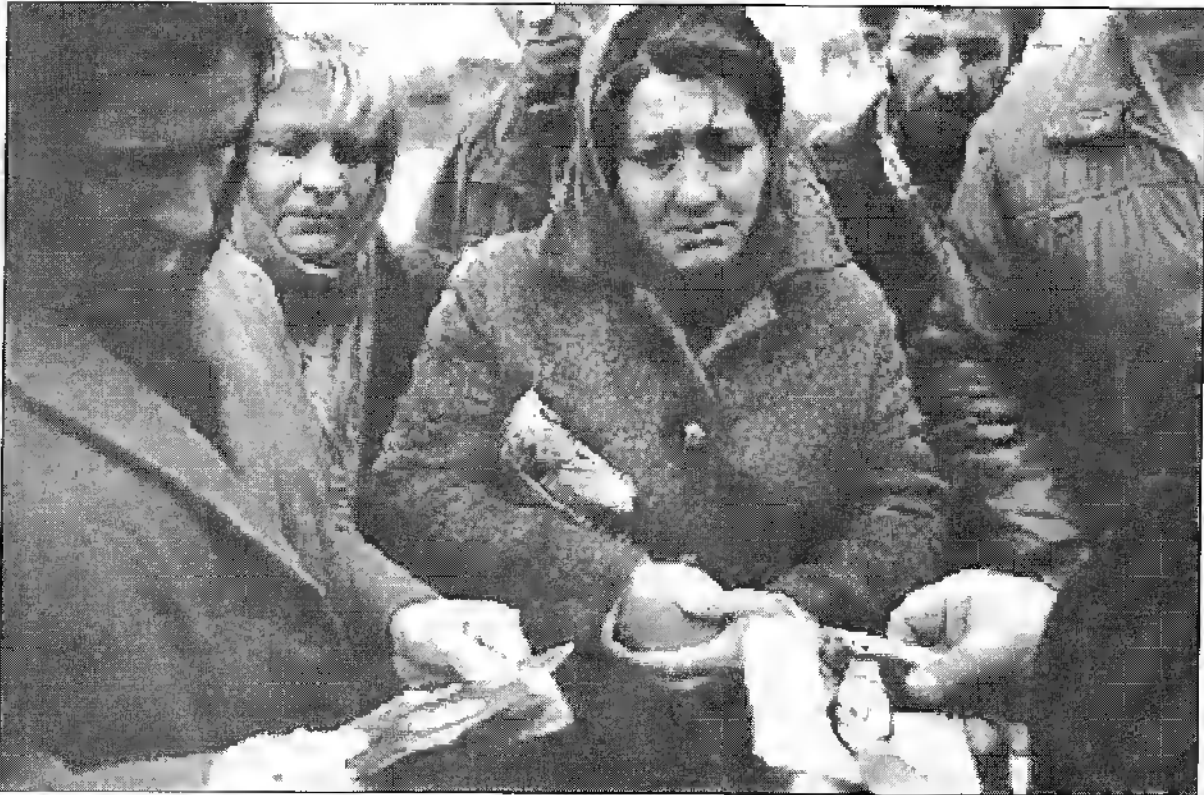


PHOTO NATALIYA MEDVEDEVA

find out how his military card had reached her and where to find him. It was the end of January. There were still battles in the town. In the basement of city hospital No.2 I met Maria Ivanovna Kirbasova, the chairperson of the committee of soldiers' mothers of Russia. I learned from her that my Kolya was not on the list of prisoners. Planes bombed the town every day, there was uninterrupted shooting. I was not afraid, I just wanted to know the fate of my son. Only on the 31 January did I manage to track down the Chechen woman, she was called Zarema. She gave me my son's military card but she was not able to say exactly how or where she had come across it. The thread had broken. I went back to Nazran. In this Ingush town close to Grozny there was no war. Thousands of refugees took refuge here. The Ingush people did as much as they could to relieve the suffering of these people who had suffered so much in war. Hundreds of Russian mothers also found refuge in the Ingush capital. Mothers came from all corners of mighty Russia to look for their sons who had disappeared without trace or who had been taken prisoner. They found shelter, understanding and sympathy among the Ingush families. People understood that Russian mothers do not want war; the fact that our children were forced to come here and fight does not benefit anyone, Russian, Chechen or Ingush.

The situation in Ingushetia was not straightforward: there were frequent attempts to provoke the country to enter the war, but Ruslan Aushev, the President of the Republic managed to supply the mothers with accommodation, transport and food. I met many mothers there, and met several of them again in Chechnya many months later. Of the hundreds of women who were in Nazran, only a few managed to find their sons alive...

I did not stay long in Nazran. I decided to try to discover something of the fate of my son from the military headquarters in Beslan and then to travel to Rostov-on-Don where they



were collecting the bodies of dead soldiers. At the head quarters they told me that my son's body must be in Rostov. I flew to Rostov early morning 2 February and looked through all the books of registration of dead soldiers. My Kolya was not among these lists. I was told that only 40% of the bodies had been identified. I had to look through all the carriages of dead bodies in Rostov. I will never be able to forget this horror...

The carriages were packed full with bodies of Russian soldiers. They were all somebody's children. Many bodies were already unrecognisable: bitten by dogs, cut into pieces, burnt... Already a month had passed since the start of the war. Rostov was simply unable to cope with this stream of death. Apart from the carriages there was also a tent city on the hospital territory. These tents were also packed with bodies. Mustering all my courage I passed through all these carriages and tents looking at every boy, the faces, the hair, and if there was no head, the hands and feet. My Kolya would be easy to find, he had a birthmark on the right cheek. There were some other mothers with me. One of them recognised her son; he had been registered under a different name. I was not able to find Kolya. The soldiers told me that not all the carriages were in Rostov — there were some more in Mozdok. So I went to Mozdok to the cinema 'Mir'. Hundreds of mothers gathered here everyday. Each one was trying to find her son and if possible to take him by force and send him home out of this hellish war.

Here there were very few mothers of soldiers lost without trace. I needed to find out: had my son's body passed through Mozdok? There were three hospitals at the airport in Mozdok. Kolya could have been seriously wounded, he could have reached this hospital and died



Valery SCHEROLDIN

here, in which case his data would be in the computer and his body in the morgue. I needed to look through the carriages of dead bodies which had come from Grozny to Mordovsk. The officer I approached seemed to agree to help me, but the next time we met he said he could do nothing for me. "What do you expect to be able to achieve? Your son is listed missing without trace!" I was overcome with despair. Is it so hard to check the computer to see if my son has been listed among the dead? If so then his body must be somewhere here. That night I dreamt that I was walking into a building with columns and the building was very much like the hospital in Rostov. I am in a large vestibule, I am standing and thinking: I have three things to distribute, one to my father on the second floor (my father died four years ago), the second to my son, but who is the third one for? All right, I'll give the things to my father and to my son. I glance round the building and see a small dividing screen, behind this is a bed on which young people are lying. I am surprised that there is room for them all on one bed, there were probably five of them. My Kolya was lying on the edge. They were hidden under a white cover, only their shaven heads were visible. With large blue eyes my son looked at me. He said: 'Mum, three quarters of the battalion perished'. In my dream I thought: here am I looking for him and he is right beside me.



PHOTO: EDWARD OPP (<http://www.glasnet.ru/~edopp>)

I woke up. It was a prophetic dream. I did not realise this straightaway, but I remembered it and only six months later it all became clear: the third parcel was for my daughter, six months later she would be killed in a car crash. All this was in front of me; I was still looking for my son...

My path took me again to Grozny. I decided to continue my search for my son. Together with a young Japanese journalist Masaaki Khoasi I was at the cemetery. Corpses from the whole town were assembled there: women, men, Christians and Muslims, all were made equal in death. I did not find my son. Despairing of finding my son's body, I decided to look for him alive. I thought in the mystery of God's plan he may have been taken prisoner. So began the fourth circle of hell.

On 4 April a group of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia appeared in the village of Vedeno. Each one had made their own way there. There were 22 of us and we met at the military headquarters. Vedeno was the headquarters of Aslan Maskhadov. The Chechens are a hospitable people and all the women were offered overnight accommodation. Vedeno is in the mountains far from civilisation but the war could be felt here too. Many inhabitants had left the village. Three Russian mothers, Svetlana Belikova, Tanya Ivanova, Olia Osipenko and I were put up in a flat from which the people had gone to Voronezh. We lived

for almost two months in Vedenov, periodically going to mountain villages to look for our children: hopes gave way to despair. Vedenov was under shariat law. Every Thursday we were able to watch the court from the window of our flat. Shariat law is strict and punishment is immediately enforced. Murder is punished by death. We also had to keep to certain rules. Even in great heat we could not appear at the bazaar without a scarf on our heads. We Russian mothers were always visible. We were often told that we had ourselves sent our children to the war, that the war depended on us, that instead of looking for our children we should all declare ourselves against Yeltsin and then the war would end. These people had forgotten that Chechnya had voted almost unanimously for Yeltsin and so this was their choice too. But in Vedenov there were some people who genuinely sympathised with us. They understood that our children were soldiers and that they had no choice. Quite recently Chechens had served in the Soviet army and they well knew what it was like. Many of them had fought in Afghanistan. We were often struck by their magnanimity. So in the hospitals of Vedenov there were Chechen separatists and Russian soldiers. As I was looking after a wounded Russian soldier, I often went to this hospital. He had a severe lung wound and a broken pelvis: he was unable to move. He had an operation and although there were not enough drugs they continued to treat him. Next to Misha Sergeev lay a Chechen, Musa, who looked after Misha when I was not there. I cooked for them and brought cigarettes. We managed to contact Misha's mother and he was sent to Khazav-Yurt in Dagestan because he needed another operation.

I often wondered who had involved our people in war; who could benefit from this war? This is not a religious war: the Almighty is one, as the Chechens said. Here on a small



VALERY SCHEKLODIN



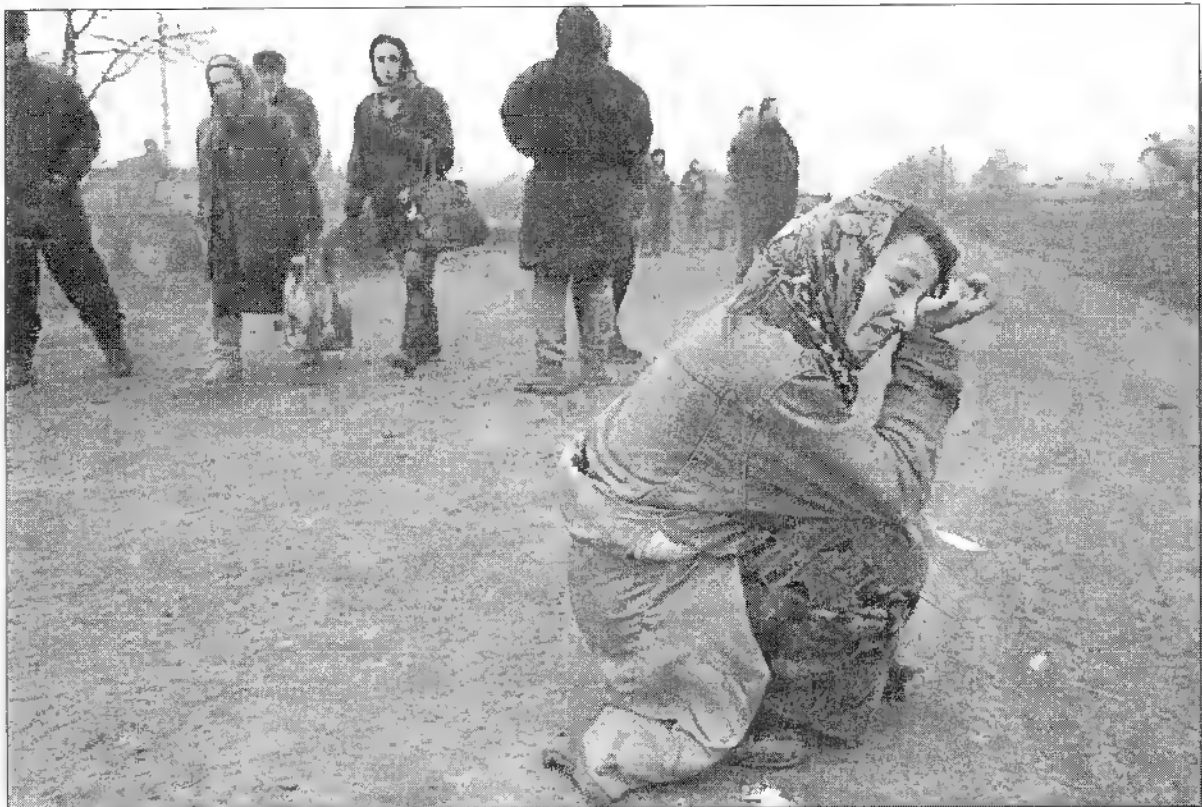
ANNA PIASETSKAYA, SECOND FROM RIGHT AT HER SON KOLYA'S FUNERAL PHOTO MASAOKI KHOASI

corner of the Earth economic interests of Russian oil magnates held sway. This is what our children and the peaceful inhabitants of Chechnya died for. The Chechen people were not fighting against the Russian people but against the presence of the Russian army in Chechnya. They did not feel hatred towards the soldiers. Everyone understood that the army was used for political and economic purposes.

Day followed day. In May there appeared a splinter of hope. We heard that some of the prisoners were in the mountains of Shatoi and my son's surname was mentioned. 5 May we were received by Aslan Maskhadov. A cease-fire had been negotiated by the Russian side which had again not fulfilled its obligations: the exchange of prisoners did not take place. The front got closer and closer to Vedeni. It was dangerous to remain in the village: bombing raids around the village became frequent. Several times the village itself was hit; on one occasion the family of the uncle of Shamil Basaev was killed. A two-storeyed building was reduced to rubble. They spent three days digging out dead bodies. There were eleven of them, mainly women and children. We were seized by despair. Can those people who sit in aeroplanes and deliver death be called human beings? Soon after that we experienced the whole horror of the bombing. The morning of that day was sunny. I got up early and prepared breakfast for everybody. I sensed something the evening before and told the women to pack their things. In the morning I woke Tanya; Olia and Sveta were already awake; and invited them all to the table, but we did not manage to eat. The planes appeared suddenly. The first bomb exploded 30 metres from the house. The windows blew out. We jumped up and ran to the door and at that moment there was a second explosion right on the corner of our house. It was impossible to breathe because of the thick cloud of dust mixed with pieces of flying glass. The windows all blew out, doors were wrenched off their hinges. The second floor collapsed; we were on the first floor. We rushed into the basement. The raid continued. We tried to stay near the exit from the basement:



in the middle it was more frightening. If the house collapses they will not be able to dig us out. After half an hour the raid stopped but planes continued to fly overhead. We had to leave that house because it was impossible to live there. Five metres from the corner of our house there was a huge hole in the ground into which the whole house would have fitted. We found out later they were using depth bombs. (*This was the name given to vacuum bombs by the local population. Editor's comment.*) Sveta was injured by flying glass. Her leg swelled up and it was hard for her to walk. During the night Tanya and I managed to send her together with Olia to the village of Shali as it was less dangerous there. Tanya and I decided to leave Vedeno together with the fighters and go to the Shatoi region where we thought our children might be. Only with difficulty did we convince the fighters to take us with them. We faced a tough journey using the only mountain path which had not been bombed. We moved only at night using no torches or lights because planes were constantly flying. But these hardships did not frighten us; we were still hoping to find our children alive. We lived in Vedeno for a few days after the bombing. The bazaar was closed, it was impossible to buy food and we had to sleep in the open. The sky was starry and the planes continued to fly with their signal lights on. Against the background of stars it was difficult to make them out and they bombed with no fear that they would be hit. Thinking about my share of the nightmare, I often recall these nights. We covered ourselves in a blanket, lay on the ground and looked at the stars trying to distinguish the planes. If a star began to fall, this meant that a plane was preparing to bomb. I thought that only the love of a person for all that lives could stop this madness. The fourth circle of hell ended but this was not the end.



Vasily SCHERKOLDIN





PHOTO: MASAOKI KHOASI

We reached the end of the mountain path which links Vedeno with Shatoi. On the way our vehicle nearly fell off the road. The steering broke and we had to leave it behind. We were not able to stay here long because the local people feared they would be bombed because fighters had come to the village. So when we reached Itum-Kole we set up camp in the wood on the bank of the Argun not far from the village. Two months of searching for our children in the Shatoi region brought no result. All our efforts were in vain. The fighters helped us as much as they could: they provided transport, shared their bread and widely distributed details of our children. We were bombed and fired upon several times.

We were some of the first to use the road which links Shatoi with Grozny. The road was littered with burnt out Russian equipment and vehicles and hundreds of dead Russian soldiers. New year's eve was not the only nightmare: the madness was continuing. Only madness could send such vehicles on such mountain roads. There were many mass graves by the roadside. It was impossible to see all this without tears. How much more blood needs to be spilled before people come to their senses and stop? We reached Grozny. Peace talks were in progress at the OSCE. At last common sense was trying to overcome madness. Russian and Chechen mothers, journalists and fighters gathered in front of the building of the Mission. I was glad to meet the Japanese journalist Masaaki and his wife again; they had been with us on the peace march. I met some Chechen women whom I knew and exchanged information with them. I also talked to the fighters. There was nothing they could say to encourage our hope. I felt it was time to return home to Moscow. Tanya decided to stay in Chechnya to look for her Andrei and then to go to Rostov-on-Don and then to go home to Neftekamsk. I left Kolya's photo with her. On 20 August I returned to

Moscow and faced a new misfortune. Five days before my arrival in Moscow, my daughter had been in an accident. Thus began the sixth circle of hell. My daughter was in a serious condition with two broken vertebrae in the neck and with concussion. It became clear she would need another operation. They planned it for the 6 September and on 4



PHOTO: NATALIYA MEDVEDEVA

September Tanya rang: she had recognised my Kolya. Under the name Evgeny Sergeevich Gilev he had been buried in the Altai in a village called Stepnoe Ozero, 300 km from Barnaul. There was a video film showing Kolya as an unknown person on 21 February. Tanya compared the film and the photo and recognised Kolya: my prophetic dream came true. Yes, I was near my son 3 March, only he was not in a carriage. He had already been put in a coffin and was being sent to Altai.

The person working the computer also made a mistake when he told me that my son did not appear on the list. The soldier who identified Kolya as his comrade Evgeny Gilev also made a mistake. They were not alike physically and did not wear the same uniform. Kolya was a paratrooper and Evgeny, a rifleman. When the coffin arrived at the village in the Altai, Evgeny's parents opened it but it was no longer possible to recognise the body. So they buried my son instead of their own. Six months later they buried another person; this time it was their son. He had been in the carriage numbered 162; his name was hidden in a pendant. His mother came to Rostov and recognised him and took him home. They buried him not far from my Kolya. They would lie together for a while...

Even today I cannot come to terms with the fact that my son is no longer alive... I often wonder why this had to happen with our children. We, the old ones, are still alive but our children are dead. What for? I still had to fight for the right to rebury my son in Moscow next to his grandfather. This will be the seventh and I hope last circle of hell.

Maria Ivanovna Kirbasova, the chairperson of Committee Soldiers' Mothers of Russia, was a great help to me. She went with me to the military headquarters. I in my own name and she in the name of the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers wrote a demand to open criminal proceedings against those in charge for negligence, and a request that my son be reburied in Moscow. 15 October, almost six weeks after I found out that my son was buried in the Altai, Kolya was brought to a military hospital in Moscow. Even here Maria Ivanovna did not leave me alone with my grief: she came with me to identify the body, came to the funeral and gave material help. I am endlessly grateful to her for this. Tanya Ivanova also came to the funeral. In Rostov she had identified her Andrei, although the word 'identify' is

not appropriate: experts named him after taking x-rays of his skull, and his chest and having determined his blood-group. The body was completely burnt: it was impossible to recognise him. So having buried her own son, Tanya came to my son's funeral. She had lost her only son but she responded to my grief too. I am very grateful. And what about the military, how did they help? Not at all. Only one person from my son's unit came to the funeral. The coffin was carried not by paratroopers but by my son's school friends. I was told there would be no government funding for the funeral because there are so many of us. At the same time the representative of the military unit 41450 spoke about the military duty which my son had carried out... What is this debt? What do we owe this State which has taken from me my most precious thing? And what else will it demand from me? I will do all I can to prevent my grandson from serving in the army. We do not need such an army.

The war in Chechnya has been going on for two years. Our politicians are engaging in a power struggle. Are there among them I wonder any sensible people who could stop the war? Every day there are more and more killed, lost without trace, wounded... But this is all far from the comfortable offices of the people in power; mothers are still tormented by the search for their lost sons.

*We did not raise our handsome,  
young sons to fight and to end in mass graves.  
And the foul politicians will not be forgiven  
for their mindless decisions and the horrible war in Chechnya.* ■

*Translated by Patricia COCRELL  
and Galina ORLOVA*

PHOTO CHRIS HUNTER



Maria KIRBASOVA

*The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia*

## CHECHNYA IN MY HEART

In November 1994 we met the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Andrei Kozarev. Many organisations were there: 'Memorial', etc. In my speech I said that for some reason all the organisations are remaining silent; it is only the Russian Committee of Soldiers' Mothers which is fighting against the sending of troops to Chechnya. I said that everyone knows even a little of the history of these people: how in the 19th century they fought the Russian army for 50 years for the freedom of their homeland; how in 1944 under Stalin's orders they were repressed and everyone was deported to Kazakhstan; how anyone could see that sending troops to Chechnya would create a second Afghanistan, not to mention how this is a direct and explicit use of the army against our own people. But all this has gone unnoticed.

Russian troops were first sent in on 26 November. They thought they would storm Grozny and capture it, but they failed. There were mercenaries recruited by the Federal Security Service: ex-servicemen and officers from the (top-flight) Tamanskaya division. Our Committee was therefore not particularly worried. So we were surprised to see an article in 'Izvestia', in which Dudayev said that he would return prisoners of war only to the 'Committee of Soldiers' Mothers' organisation. That made me realize that we enjoy authority. Probably after our work in Azerbaijan in 1990. It was, however, Yushenkov and other members of parliament who went to fetch the POWs after the 26th. Our Angelica Chechina asked to go with them, but they left without her. So it was a member of parliament who went to Grozny, collected up 2 or 3 POWs and rushed back to Moscow to give an interview. It would have been funny, had it not been so loathsome and vile, trading live human beings.

At the beginning of December, the mothers of paratroopers from the Stavropol'skaya brigade came to us. Their sons had managed to phone and inform them that they were being sent to Grozny. We organised a group, wrote appeals and picketed the State Duma, but regardless, on 11 December, Russian troops were sent into Chechnya, two columns of them, through Ingushetia and Dagestan.

The war had begun.

For the whole of January the streets of Grozny were covered with the bodies of thousands of our soldiers. Wagon-loads of unidentified bodies are still lying in the hospital at Rostov-on-Don. As the boys who survived told us, in the Grozny assault conscripts went ahead under the barrels of the Special Police Force machine-guns which were following 50 meters behind them, like in the Second World War, when special KGB groups would move in behind attacking troops and block their way back.

On 16 December we organised a 'hot line'. We collected mothers' inquiries about their sons by phone. Mothers all over Russia were desperate because troops were being poured into Chechnya but their mothers were not being informed, and the boys were forbidden to write home about it. Our Committee turned out to be the only organisation which accepted inquiries. We forwarded them to the headquarters, received the replies and told the mothers where their sons were. We ran the 'hot



PHOTO. 'NIPPONZAN MYOKHODZHI'

line' for two weeks. To the Ministry of Defence I said: 'Why are we doing your work? You are the ones who sent the boys into the army, and they are fulfilling their duty as soldiers. Why aren't you fulfilling your duty to their parents? Parents have the right to know where their sons have been sent, to know what's happened to them, whether they've been killed or wounded'. Within two weeks the Ministry of Defence had introduced 'hot lines' to all the headquarters.

Resulting from the 'hot lines' — and this point is important — we started demanding the publication of lists of those killed and wounded. We sent our appeal to the President on 20 December. In tsarist Russia these lists used to be published; it is standard practice everywhere; and these figures ought to be revealed. But so far, the truth has not been published at all. Following our appeal, Zadonsky, a member of parliament, prepared a draft law on the publication of such lists. And just like that, the faction, 'Women of Russia' (we have written evidence) objected to it! Sergei Shakhrai, the 'peace-maker', who at that time headed the Nationalities Ministry, objected! It was monstrous! What it came down to is that this would not be to their advantage: it would cause an uproar. During the Grozny assault that night of 31 December into 1 January the losses sustained were enormous.

The first time we went to Chechnya was on 10 January 1995. The mothers travelled either with the Committee or independently. There were many, very many of them. At this point I would like to say a few words about the kindness shown by the administrations of those regions of Russia, where the mothers' grief was met with responsiveness and compassion. The administrative offices helped with transport and a lorry. Our thanks go to them.

With my own eyes I saw the mothers' miracles of heroism. On 18 January Krayeva crawled on her knees to Dudayev's Palace for her prisoner-of-war son because it was impossible either to drive or to walk. They returned her son to her, and she left overjoyed.



And Masha Fedulova! Masha made her way to Chechnya on her own. We met her in the basement of No. 2 hospital in Grozny. I had already seen her son in Shamil Basayev's Abkhazian battalion and when I told her, she set off at a run under the firing. She had to run up a hill and was clearly visible — a perfect target for snipers. It turned out that the previous day her son, Denis, had been swapped for a Chechen. Shamil Basayev said they would never have done it if they had known that his mother was coming. The Procurator of Chechnya, Usman Imayev, lent his assistance in getting the son returned to his mother and she left for home to Moscow with him. That was on 28 January.

It is often said that seeing something once is better than hearing about it a hundred times. In Moscow we knew that this war was horrendous, but what we saw was ten times worse than anything we had expected back in Moscow. When, on 8 January the mothers fought their way under fire to the President's Palace, we were asked: 'Do you want to have a look at your soldiers who have been killed?' So we ran in zigzags, because snipers were shooting at every moving target. To my dying day I will remember the three corpses lying near the garages, one with its leg eaten away by dogs. How I screamed . . . And then we saw a lot of dead bodies. They had been lying there since the assault. All of them had been eaten away; they were already unrecognisable. What cruelty! I think this is a special feature of our country — cruelty towards fallen soldiers. I saw how the Chechens bury their dead. When on 24 January a surgeon called Rezvan was killed by mortar shrapnel, I was watching. They immediately wrap the body in a white cloth, say prayers, lay the body down, and any passing car will stop to take it that very day to be buried. How much more humane they are than are we and our Russian generals. You have to be there, to see it day in and day out.



Valley SCHERKOLDIN

I went to Khasav-Yurt to make a phone call to Moscow. One of our members, Yulya Goryacheva, had gone to school with the wife of the President's Assistant, Satarov. Through her we hoped to get through to Yeltsin to have him proclaim a cease-fire to let us retrieve the bodies of our boys. It was a terrible disgrace. I phoned and Yulya promised to help. Later in Moscow she told us

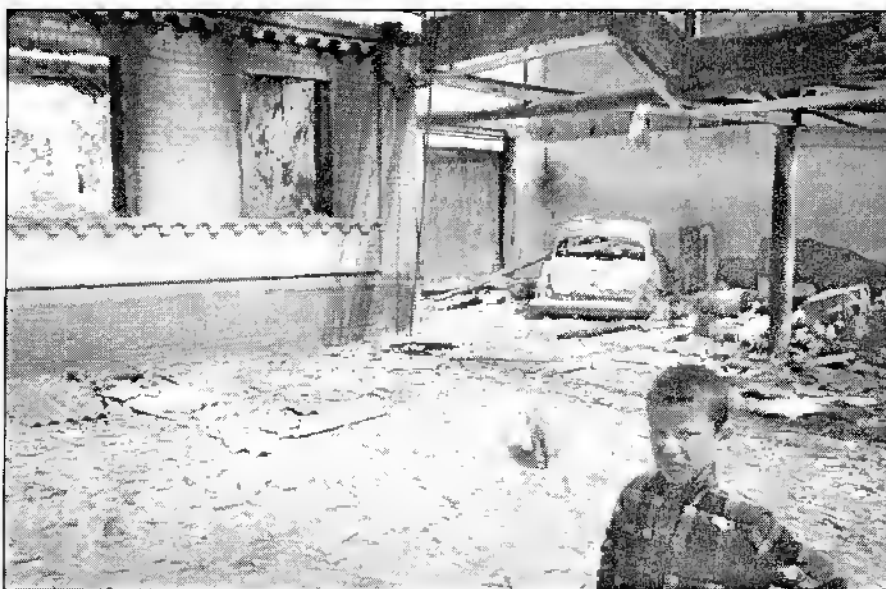


PHOTO: CHRIS HUNTER

that she had not been able to catch Satarov either at his flat or his datcha, or anywhere. He had simply gone into hiding. A coward too.

We were waiting for that cease-fire so desperately; we wanted a tally of the number of soldiers killed. Only later did I realise how naive I had been: the very thing that Russia's generals needed to conceal was the number of personnel lost that New Year's night. On TV1 a cease-fire was announced — but there wasn't one. The bombing carried on just as before. Young Chechen fighters would come back from a battle and turn on Galya Sevruck and me. After all, we were Russia's 'representatives'. The whole of that terrible January we were answerable for the entire Russian army — and the lying propaganda too. All the same I managed to find something to say, but Galya could only weep, speechless. I realise what it was like for her. I am a Kalmyk, a representative of yet another repressed people; I understand and get on well with the Chechens, but she is Russian. Suddenly, Galya said: 'Oh God! What are we going to do? You Chechens are part of us — and so are the Russian soldiers'. This was the truth of the matter. The army was killing its own people. If the Chechen Republic is a part of Russia, why should the army kill its own people?

On 10 January, when Sergei Kovalev arrived with his group, Maskhadov went to have a discussion with General Babichev, who was in joint command with General Rokhlin during the assault on Grozny. He returned well satisfied: 'Babichev has agreed to a cease-fire'. The Chechens said: 'We have agreed to help your boys go and bring in the dead'. To Muslims it is blasphemy to leave them — they call them 'lads' — unburied once they're dead and of no use to anybody. We were so ashamed that a Chechen general had to ask the Russian generals to go and retrieve their own dead. But the following day Babichev did not even make contact. I think he had been in touch with Grachev (the Minister of Defence) overnight. We thought we would die of shame.

On 12 January at 8 am the Palace suddenly seemed to shudder! The force of the strike was immense; the air filled with dust and lime and it was almost impossible to breathe. What they had done was to use an 'earth-to-earth' missile, although they knew perfectly well that we (representatives of the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers) and 87 POWs, many of whom were wounded, were in the Palace. Maskhadov ordered us to carry the wounded out and commanded Basayev to rush the only armoured troop-carrier they had to us. On the night of 13 January it arrived, and we started loading on the seriously wounded. Maskhadov gave us three of his soldiers; they crammed us into the troop-carrier and we drove off.

Although they bombarded the Palace virtually without a break and were using missiles which strike very accurately, the Palace remained standing because Grozny is situated in a seismic zone and the Palace was built to withstand earthquakes registering 12 on the Richter scale. Neither bombs nor 'Grad' missiles were therefore able to do anything. Then they started to use vacuum bombs, which possess great penetrating power, and pierced the roof and all six floors. One of these bombs fell straight onto the bed of a young wounded Bashkir boy, but at that moment he was at a dressing station which is why he was not killed. Then Maskhadov gave the order to abandon the Palace. They left on 21 January. They abandoned it of their own free will.

On 18 January we met Dzhokhar Dudayev. It was he who came to see us. The meeting took place in Shamil Basayev's Abkhazian battalion, in the canteen. (How cold it was there!). Dudayev talked with us for an hour and a half. We discussed many of the problems: sovereignty, the blockade, the war. Then I fell out with him. As it is, I am against violence because I am a Buddhist, and he had





PHOTO COLIN HUNTER

said that there would be acts of terrorism, that they would torch the towns. When I started saying that on no account should civilians be involved, he replied: 'Then why are they allowed to kill us?' And, you know, there was nothing I could say to that. As for Shamil's act of terrorism in Budyonnovsk, I don't excuse it, but I do UNDERSTAND that they had no other way out. No-one could stop this war: neither Sergei Kovalev and his group, nor the mothers who joined the Peace March under bombardment. We pondered this bitterly for a long time and reached the horrible conclusion that in this country it is only the language of violence that is understood. Basayev's act of terrorism was, of course, incredibly cruel, but it was an act of desperation in order to stop the war. And it did! If only for a short time.

When I left Grozny on 8 February and found myself in Nazran, I saw, in the office of Pyotr Kosov, Assistant to the President of Ingushetia, a list of 600 POWs. But there were only 137 on my list. Later I realised where this list had come from. The mothers from Maykop (a neighbouring area) had also gone to Maskhadov. But the entire Maykop brigade had been killed. They couldn't bear to believe this and had recorded those lost as captives.

We are often asked how many captives we have managed to release. A few — about 100 men. When I returned to Moscow on 13 February, we did not publicly say how many POWs we had saved. I believe that if you do someone a good turn, you should never shout about it yourself. People have eyes; if they want to see, they will. If they don't — it's up to them. This is my credo. If we have saved even a single soldier's life, it means our existence on earth is justified. ■

*Translated by Irina TOROPOVA  
and Lindsay HOSSACK  
(‘Peace Translation Project’)*

**Vyacheslav SLESARENKO**

*Monk of the Buddhist order "Nipponzan Myokhodzhi"*

## "NEVER TO FORGET THIS ..."

For the third time we witness the horrible sight of ruined houses without windows or doors, with holes in the walls and crushed ceilings. There are hardly any trees left. The inhabitants of Grozny and most Chechen villages, who managed to survive several months of terrible fighting, are grouped around the OSCE mission. Still, to eradicate belief is the most difficult thing. Naturally we arouse attentive interest, and even during the search for a toilet amidst the ruins we are bombarded with questions. Two men who behave like friends and arouse suspicion because they do not know the language, declare that they are water carriers from Kabarda who have come to restore the town.

These recollections rushed past in an instant when the bus was stopped by one of the "water carriers" with a machine gun in his hands. Soldiers dragged us out of the bus by the scruff of the neck and kicked us until we stood with our hands raised, facing the "gazon", a military version of a jeep. Blindfolding us they explained that any talking, turning of the head or other brisk movements were forbidden. Especially if we do not want any more trouble... this had been soft treatment only... After shoving us, eight monks, into one car they drove us away, accompanied by an armoured vehicle. For a long time they took us through some small streets in order to make us lose orientation. We could hear how they called the headquarters over the phone to tell them that "the goods would arrive soon —



Valery SCHKOLDIN





PHOTO "MIPPONZAN MYOKHODZH"

and that they should prepare a welcome". And they did prepare one... We were thrown to the ground, they beat us. Hands behind the head, legs apart. Cursing us, they took several ornate pegs off Sansei while our wooden ones were simply broken into pieces. They did not have enough handcuffs, so my hands were tied with a thin belt. Of course, they did not forget to remove the Japanese watch before that. The soldier who took the watch off me poked me in the back with his gun, saying: "I'll kill you, I promise! You betrayed Russia, you believe in the wrong God! Right now I can't do it... But just you wait, I'll kill you all the same!"

Mother Earth took all suffering, all worries upon herself, and wrapped herself up in moist scent and cold. It was even nice just to be lying there like that. Thank God that Nastya had put on her dress in the Chechen style. They did not notice her among the women who were travelling with us. Grabbing hold of my rucksack I managed to pass onto her my camera and the film material which bears witness to the dimensions of the resistance of the Chechen people against the Russian invasion. Eventually they took me and threw me in a hole together with the rest of our group. They had not taken off the pieces of cloth with which we had been blindfolded, and it was very difficult to get used to this.

However, now I was almost certain that they would not kill us. The soldiers took turns in beating us. One sat down in front of the hole and for a long time asked all kinds of questions, weighing a cudgel in his hand. Who were we, where were we from, what were we doing here? On going away he told his friends: "No. I won't kill these people." They answered him: "Have you joined the Salvation Army or what?" "Well, you see, they are monks". "Have you ever seen monks in track shoes?". "No. I'm not going to kill them". "I'm gonna take the track shoes myself then." "Just like that? And what is he gonna walk in?" "I'll give him my old tennis shoes, and in any case he won't have to walk around for much longer. They are monks, after all."

Kolya asked permission to go to the toilet, and to our great surprise they decided to take him there. At that point some big car arrived. Asking where we were supposed to be taken to they pulled us out of the hole and sat us down in the car. However, those who had come for us were not young soldiers, they were contract soldiers or officers of some special unit. Again we did not know where they were taking us.

The simultaneous feelings of absolute helplessness and dependence on them paired with the freedom to chose — to be full of anxiety or completely calm, to suffer or to overcome suffering. To deplore the things one did not manage to do in one's life or else to feel joy in front of the possibility to attain a new bodily state and possibly better conditions in a life to come. But what kind of a bodily state? Who knows for certain? And what kind of conditions? Are the present ones not better than the ones to be? Blindfolded, we were forced to turn to our selves over and over again, each time ever more deeply. To look into every nook and cranny of ourselves, to remember all the good and bad moments of one's life. To realize once more one's predilections, to feel once more their power. The external conditions themselves changed my attitude towards all phenomena of the environment, inside and outside of my self. What was ahead of us? What were my brothers thinking of and what was our Teacher thinking of all this? I did not know. I did not know that ahead of us there were still long days in the filtration camp. I did not know that there would still be a flight back to Moscow. And I certainly did not know that back in Moscow I would chance to see the Russian soldier who flew out of Chechnya together with us, with my watch around his wrist. I looked into his eyes and understood that at that moment he would have liked to kill me even more than back in Chechnya. But now he could not. And my only wish was never to forget this. ■

*Translated by Wolf IRO  
and Christopher HUNTER*



Valery SCHEKOLDIN

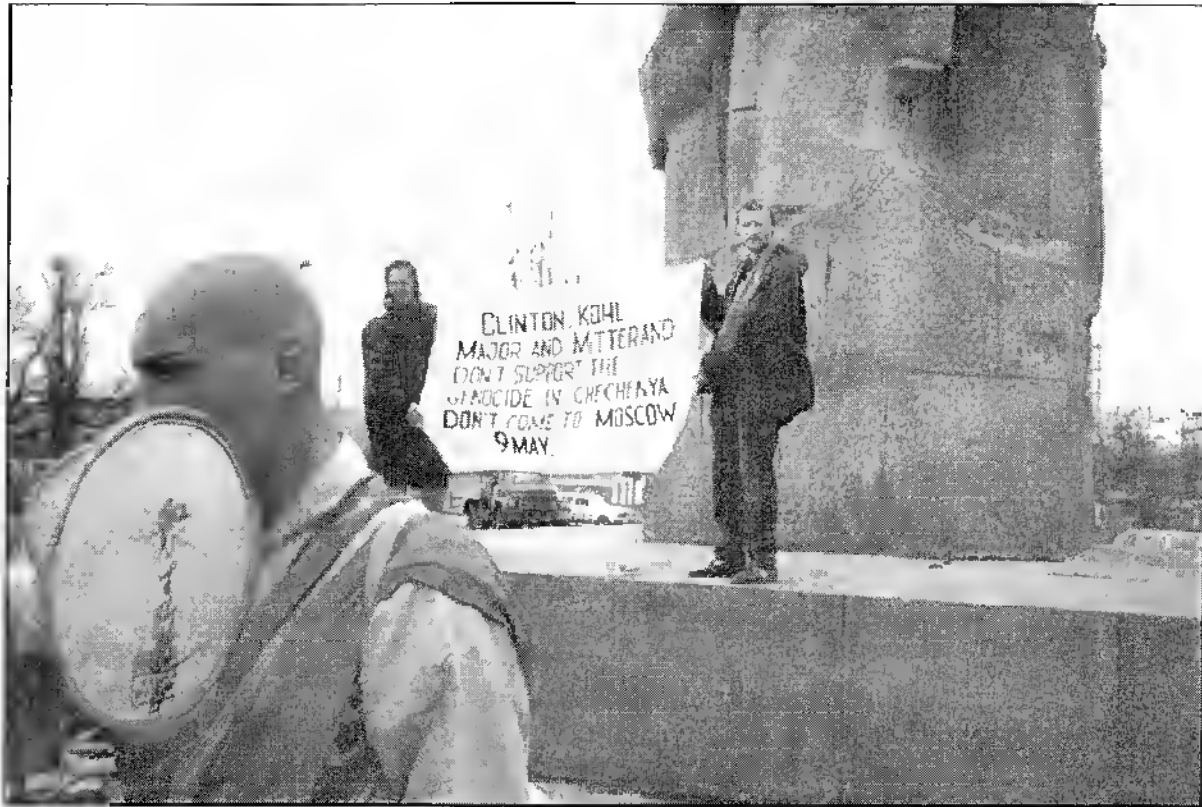


PHOTO: "QUAKERS PEACE & SERVICE"

**The Venerable Dzyunsei TERASAWA**  
*Buddhist monk from Japan Teacher of the Order  
of the Lotus Leaf ("Nipponzan Myokhodzhi")  
in Russia and the Ukraine*

## **THE WAR IN CHECHNYA AS A CRISIS OF CONTEMPORARY CIVILISATION**

The root of the evil reflected in the Chechen war stems from our very own consciousness. It is poisoned by three factors: ignorance, greed and wrath. If you probe even deeper, there is one factor in particular — basic ignorance. Buddha teaches us that all suffering in the world is caused by want and greed. I am applying this to the Chechen war as a whole.

Above all, the Russian side justifies its aggressive act with reference to the maintenance of its territorial borders and the establishing of its constitutional order. However, they do not openly talk about their real motives. There are several of them, and they are connected with the crisis of today's civilisation. The largest part of the global economy is controlled by a handful of people only. I am talking about the governments of the rich countries. Why do

they own and control the biggest part of the world's resources, and how do they attain this control? Through military power. How can they keep their military power? By developing a huge military industry and machinery. In recent years the military industry of the rich countries has been having big problems: they cannot find a reason to carry on with their huge production that costs them so much money. And thus they have to create a reason for keeping the military machinery and justify the budget of the Ministries of Defence.

The economies of these countries depend considerably on the military-industrial complex. The above-mentioned aspects relate to the United States of America as well as to Russia, two huge military powers whose economies are already seriously affected by the problems of the military-industrial complex of the respective countries. At this moment these industries are already unable to exist without the yearly support from the budgets of the Ministries of Defence. In order to justify the expenditure of such huge sums of money they need a war. Without a war the military industry and the military machinery cannot exist. Therefore these countries need a culture of violence. In order to create such a culture the governments of these countries have to carry out false patriotic propaganda and foster the adoration of military power. Without the patriotic support of the people, military industries cannot exist in society. This consideration leads to the creation of a patriotic atmosphere.

Patriotism and militarism are mutually dependent. However, in actual fact nobody thinks about the protection of the country and its people but only about the covering up of the true motivations which are at work in the government. I am talking about the grabbing of the people's money and the spending of it on military production. People do not receive a regular income; schools, hospitals and houses cannot be kept properly. Instead of developing the economy, the leaders of the country steal the money from the people in



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order to give it to the military-industrial complex. For this you always need a war. And in order to start a war, the leaders of the country have to instill in the people a hatred directed towards different nations. Without such a hatred the people will not support the leaders. Patriotism based on the hatred of other nations is a false one. Precisely that kind of patriotism, however, is needed in order to justify a war. At present Russian society is seriously ill. As concerns the economy — the situation is hopeless. Concerning politics, the leaders of the country are forced to resort to emotional propaganda against the Chechen people.



PHOTO: MASAOKI KHOASI

This is one of the reasons why the war started. But there is an even deeper reason. At this moment all the rich countries are keen to support Russia in order to incorporate it into the group of capitalist countries after the fall of communism. These efforts have been going on since 1991, the time of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. However, in the last five years the economy has suffered from a severe breakdown. This means in practice that the West was not able to offer any cogent philosophy concerning the future of the world. What happened was that after the end of the cold war and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Western countries wanted to retain their wealth and their control over the world, turning the Russian reforms into a means to attain their own aims. This is the real picture of what happened in the last five years of reforms in Russia. The West is afraid to admit the failure of the reforms, and Yeltsin is also afraid to admit it. The only thing they are afraid of is the return of communism. Therefore the western powers and Yeltsin are working together.

What did the West mean to achieve through the reforms in Russia? They wanted to attain control of the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Near East for the sake of their economic interests. Under no circumstances is the West willing to agree that this sensitive geopolitical area should fall under the control of Islamic culture.

The Gulf War, in the name of the United Nations, utterly destroyed the entire country of Iraq and dealt a tremendous blow to the Iraqi people: all the social mechanisms, bridges, communications, transport, factories and hospitals were demolished. Why did the West have to destroy Iraq? Only because after the collapse of Communism, the United States had to gain control of this vast oil-producing territory in order to safeguard its economic future, a future dependent on the control of all the resources of the Middle East, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia...

Mara's\* hordes — the fundamental ignorance — are what the Chechen war is battling to destroy. ■

\* *Translator's note:* In Buddhist doctrine, Mara, 'Lord of the Senses', was Buddha's tempter. Buddha however, succeeded in resisting Mara's deceptions and attained Enlightenment.

*Translated by Wolf IRO  
and Christopher HUNTER*



Mikhail ROSHCHIN

*Member of the Moscow Quaker group*

## THE MOTHERS' MARCH OF COMPASSION

*notes of a participant*

Life and death are the two eternal themes of any religion. Therefore it seems natural to me that the first real attempt to put an end to the war in Chechnya was undertaken primarily by believers. The idea for a march for peace in Chechnya as the Mothers' March of Compassion was developed by the leader of the Buddhist order "Nipponzan-Myokhodzhi" in Moscow, the Japanese teacher Terasawa. The monks were joined in their effort by the following organisations: The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, the Moscow Quaker group and the human rights organisation "Omega". On 8.3.1995 the leading group of the participants of the march left for Saratov after a symbolic walk around the Kremlin. The group consisted of representatives of various religious denominations: Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Jews.

The Russian public reacted positively to the idea of the march, but the further we approached the North Caucasus the more the attitude of the local authorities changed to one of caution. Half way from Minvody to Nalchik, in the small town of Prokhladnoe, the militia forced the participants to leave the train and moved them into a coach in order to send them to Mozdok. With great difficulties the leading group managed to get to Nazran, the capital of Ingushetia, where they were to be joined



Valery SCHEKOLGIN



PHOTO: "NIPPONZAN MYOKHODZHI"

by the rest of the participants. The people of Ingushetia and the government of the republic supported the idea of a peace march and in my opinion treated us like brothers. The beginning of the march from Nazran to Grozny was set for the 25 March 1995. On that day we gathered on the town square. Prayers were read out by Buddhists, Muslims, Christians and Jews. We swore not to resort to violence even as a means of self-defence.

The group set off along the streets of Nazran. People were carrying icons and Buddhist banners. It seemed as if the whole town had come to accompany us. Many believed in the success of our mission. Soon we had reached the first Chechen village, Sernovodsk. The inhabitants welcomed us offering bread and salt. The women were crying. People gathered in the centre of the village and read out a prayer for peace. We spent the night there and had dinner in candlelight (informed of the march, the local authorities had switched off electricity in the evening). At that point in time, Sernovodsk was part of the protection zone of the Ministry for Emergency Situations and was not subjected to bombing and shelling. However, the inhabitants were living in constant fear that the Russian forces would find a pretext to move into the village. Unfortunately, this is what happened a year later, and now the village of Sleptsovskaya, bordering Chechnya on the Ingush side, is crowded with refugees from Sernovodsk.

On the following day the participants moved on to Samashki. Alongside the road, helicopters were shooting at something, while Buddhist hymns and Muslim songs rang out over the barren Chechen fields. There was a Russian checkpoint at the entrance to Samashki. The Russian soldiers did not want to let us in but eventually did so all the same. Why? Apparently they had been lured into a trap before Achkhoy-Martan. In Samashki, too, the people welcomed us with bread and salt. We were likewise welcomed by the Chechen resistance fighters, many of whom were not older than 18 years. When we came to Samashki, it was a blossoming village. Later on it was twice "cleansed" of resistance fighters by the Russian forces.

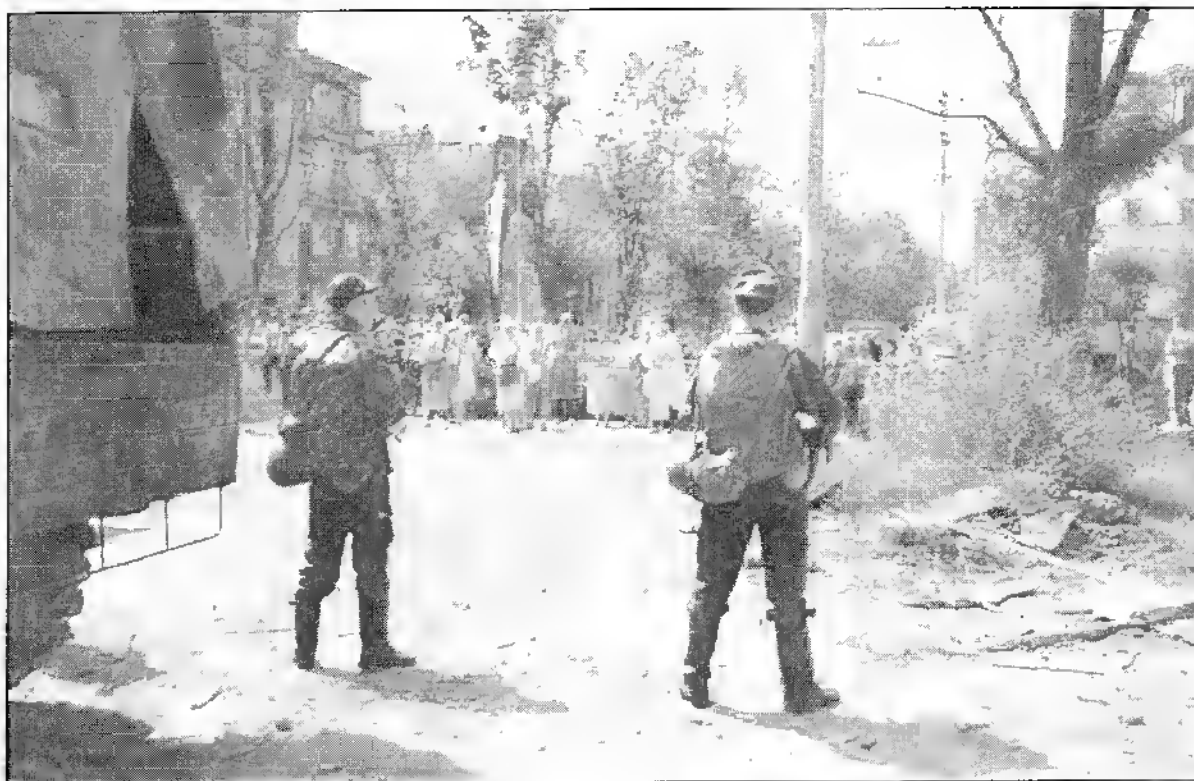


PHOTO: "NIPPONZAN MYOKHODZHI"

On the same day we travelled on to Achkhoy-Martan. Approaching the village, we were stopped at a checkpoint. Armoured vehicles and Russian soldiers with guns slung across their bodies were blocking the way into the village and separated us from women from Achkhoy-Martan who had come to meet us with peaceful slogans. We knelt down and prayed for peace for several hours. From the village we could hear Muslim songs. Soon a cold rain set in that soaked us. Around ten o'clock at night the Russian forces were joined by reinforcement troops and our group, containing some several hundred completely peaceful people, mostly women, was removed from Chechen territory by force. Buddhist monks, three soldiers' mothers and a Chechen driver were detained. The monks and the soldiers' mothers were flown back to Moscow in a military aircraft, while the Chechen driver was sent to a filtration camp where he was released only two weeks later. The rest of the participants of the march, including the author of these lines, were more lucky, so to speak, and reached Nazran more or less in peace. This is how our attempt to bring peace to the Chechen land was brought to an end due to the fact that our right to free movement was curtailed by Russian forces.

Later, on 21 April 1995 (on the eve of Russian Easter) we finally got to Grozny. With icons, Buddhist banners and the sign of the soldiers' mothers in our hands we marched along the Alley of Friendship up to the presidential palace. This time there were far less of us, around 50 people. The city which not long ago had been taken by Russian forces lay in ruins. (Midway we had to go around a huge crater left by a vacuum bomb). The inhabitants of the city, Chechens and Russians, met us with joy and amazement. Cars stopped and drivers and passengers welcomed the unexpected appearance of peaceful demonstrators in a town filled with military personnel. As far as I know, our march was the first peaceful demonstration in Grozny after the cruel battle there. We brought the hope of peace to the suffering population of the city. ■

*Translated by Wolf IRO  
and Christopher HUNTER*



PHOTO. MASAOKI KHOASI

**Andrei BLINUSHOV**

*Member of the Observer Mission of Human Rights and  
Public Organizations in the Conflict Zone in Chechnya*

## "FOR US THERE WILL BE NO FORGIVENESS "

It is the last day of the March expedition to Chechnya. We cannot stay any longer — our time has run out. Back home — botched projects and cancelled meetings. Every time I leave Chechnya I feel like a traitor. Every time, I abandon people in an extremely tense situation. Every time our friends, who remain in this nightmare, ask one and the same question: 'Will you be back soon?'

When will I go back? When 'native' federal troops shoot up and pillage yet another village? Or when Moscow or Tambov OMON forces yet again snatch up a dozen peasants and carry them off to an unknown destination so they can barter with their relatives: three million or a 'Zhiguli' (car) in exchange for a shepherd and a driver?

Oh God! How much longer are you going to put up with all the treachery, the bloodshed, the shameful indifference of the Russians, the veiled reproaches the West has made to the President, a President who, through impunity — and vodka — has gone clean off his head?

As it turns out, I lied when I persuaded the inhabitants of bomb-shattered Grozny not to lose faith, not to become embittered. Look, I said, this terrible war must come to an end soon. But it's not



ending. It's becoming more and more brutal, sweeping the last small islands of peace from Chechen earth. And there is nothing we can do. To the accompaniment of our appeals and our press conferences the authorities are continuing their incredibly brutal annihilation of the republic's populace. I have lost heart. How can anyone live with all this? I don't know.

The punitive operation carried out by Russia's Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Defence on 3-4 March 1996 in the village of Sernovodsk, right on the border with Ingushetia, differed in principle from the pogrom which those very departments carried out in the village of Samashki in April of the previous year. The Samashki 'operation' was given extensive publicity — this was the first PUNITIVE action. After that there was Novogrozny, Aleroi.

From the very beginning of the war Sernovodsk was considered a 'peace zone'. It was where refugees came to from all over Chechnya. The Sernovodsk 'Caucasus' health resort which until 1990 had the status of 'All-Union sanatorium' was turned into a major refugee camp. Its buildings provided shelter to about nine thousand former inhabitants of Grozny, Gudermes, Argun, Orekhovo, Samashki. Several thousand more forced migrants were accommodated by local families. Sernovodsk came under the supervision of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Red Cross, the International Organisation for Migration, the French 'Medecins sans Frontieres', and the German 'Kapanamur'. In the last six months visits have been made by Kovalev, the human rights representative; Belyaev, leader of the 'Our Home is Russia' party; Shteyn and Kurochkin of the Federation Council; and Shabad, Rybakov, Borschev and Titenko, members of the State Duma. Representatives of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and military police have also come to Sernovodsk. None has confirmed the statements made by the Russian Ministry of the Interior's press service regarding large detachments of rebel fighters,



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Dudayev's armoured units or anti-aircraft artillery. Why? Because there was nothing of the sort in Semnovodsk. There is, however, one person who is very troubled by this village. At one time he was a very powerful man, but now he hides behind the Rapid Reaction Force and the OMON Special Force, rounded up from all over Russia. This man, Doku Zavgayev, has not forgiven the humiliation of 1991, when Chechen Communist officials were driven out of the Supreme Soviet in Grozny.

When the time came to be rid of Salambek Khadzhiyev, who had suddenly started 'peacemaking' with detachments from the Chechen resistance, the Moscow patrons suddenly remembered Doku Zavgayev. His finest hour had come. His hour of revenge against his own people. It was he who intimidated the Kremlin with stories of 'bandit groupings', occupied villages, Maskhadov's tank battalions and Basayev's millions of dollars. The end of the war and the withdrawal of troops would mean the utter ruin of this little tsar of the concrete shelters, who panics at staying overnight in the same place more than once.

Sernovodsk, the biggest settlement in Western Chechnya, refused to admit a prefect appointed by Zavgayev and militiamen dispatched from Grozny. The village already had its elected authorities, and a residents' assembly openly expressed its opinion of the newly-arrived emissaries. Sernovodsk refused to take part in the last elections.

Nevertheless, Zavgayev firmly resolved to bring the village to its knees.

Since last autumn Semnovodsk has been blockaded by troops, and humiliation and extortion started occurring at the check points. Periodically the federals would fire at the village: sometimes after a few vodkas, they would clown about with a machine-gun. Sometimes, if they were in a foul mood, they would 'let rip' from a mortar. The fact is, there was no sense of responsibility whatsoever. The villagers' petitions elicited no reaction from Moscow, and the Russian office of the military police corps, with much bogus ceremony, pretended to investigate the violation of the law. A military police officer was trying to stop a bus driver being beaten up at a check point in Sernovodsk, when a general from the army of the Ministry of the Interior literally threw him out on his ear. He only just escaped being sent to a filtration point for 'rehabilitation'. Had there been any free 'avtoseks' (van for transporting prisoners), I am sure he would have blindfolded the military police officer and sent him off.

The army would abduct people and then sell them back to their relatives for a fee

of several million. The soldiers, having become brutalised, would rape women. Two girls lost their lives after one such occasion — their relatives couldn't bear the disgrace. Whereas in Grozny envoys from Sernovodsk would be met with understanding. Carefully collating the residents' statements and stacking them in piles, they would grieve with them: 'They say that Shkirko and Tikhomirov

PHOTO. NATALIYA MEDVEDEVA



are throwing aside all restraint — their mercenaries have got completely out of hand'. 'But', they would say, 'there is a way out. Just recognise Zavgayev and somehow, everything will work out. We will help you.'

General Artemov, the troop commander in Western Chechnya, informed the villagers in writing(!) of artillery attacks and air strikes planned for Sernovodsk if the inhabitants did not: . . . And so it went on for a whole page, listing the general's demands. It's quite possible that it didn't only include things like the obligatory polishing of the general's boots every morning and showering rose petals on BTRs (armoured troops carriers). In Sernovodsk they understood that Zavgayev, in a fit of revenge, would be capable of anything. And on the first of March the village agreed to sign a 'peace treaty' with Zavgayev's government — although, as I note, no war was being waged. This signing was to take place on Sunday 3 March, at 10 a.m. People heaved a sigh of relief. That Saturday night into Sunday, Sernovodsk was not fired on! It was the first night of calm for months. And then at 6 a.m., troops entered Sernovodsk, closing in from three sides. They came in, shooting point-blank at several farmsteads and a 'Zhiguli' with three passengers . . . The subsequent course of events is well known: resistance by a handful of inhabitants, a massed air and artillery attack on the village, a second assault, 'cleansing' — houses pillaged, corpses burnt in the mosque, cattle shot down from BTRs, and closure of the 'humanitarian corridor'.

The Sernovodsk pogrom is noteworthy not only for Zavgayev's perfidy, but also for the brutality of the federal troops and the impotence of the international humanitarian organisations. For the first time — both here and simultaneously in Grozny — the federals thrust Zavgayev's Chechen OMON into the front line of the attackers.



Valery SHEKOLDIN



PHOTO "NIPPONZAN MYOKHODZHI"

A major step had now been taken towards 'chechenizing' the war. This kind of thing is always evidence of crisis in the aggressor's strategy. It happened in 1984 in Afghanistan. At that time Western military analysts took this to indicate that the USSR was, seemingly, ready to withdraw its troops. Withdrawal only took place in 1989. Does this mean that the Chechen war has another five years to run?

Just before I left Chechnya I was passed the information that the federal command had given an ultimatum to the village of Samashki. It seemed unthinkable. An echo of the terrible pogrom in Samashki in April last year resounded all over the world — Samashki had become the tragic symbol of the Chechen war. On 16 March 1996, correspondents from Radio Liberty reported concentrated fire on the village and the beginning of an assault.

For the whole of this terrible year, in my capacity as a member of the Mission of Observers in Chechnya conducting independent research and preparing reports for the press and for factual accounts, I have striven to suppress my emotions and to avoid radicalism in my appraisals; I have tried to be unbiased and detached. May my fellow human rights activists forgive me — my strength is exhausted; a dam has collapsed. It is we who are to blame for the continuance of this unthinkable nightmare; we are powerless, unprofessional, cowardly and indifferent. We continue paying taxes for this war; we are, after all, tired of rallies and protests. We reached the point where we had to give our electoral support to the murderer in order to stop the Communists getting in — and so that we wouldn't be deprived of the opportunity of talking utter nonsense at our get-togethers in Moscow suburban holiday resorts. We lost sight of how the bloodied junta actually came to power. And we have allowed it to flood the country with blood, frightening one another with the hypothetical threat of Red fascism. We will be damned for all this. For us there will be no forgiveness. ■

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**Victor POPKOV**

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## **FREEDOM IN THE NAME OF PEACE**

It is tragic, but regrettably true, that death always puts everything in its place. Some time ago the supposition that 'Dzhokhar is war; he and Moscow have made a deal to keep the war going; on both sides billionaires are being created and with their help both sides are giving more power to their criminals' sounded plausible to many — even in Chechnya.

But these insulting conjectures are destroyed in the light of the Russian authorities' single-minded assassination of Dudayev and his closest comrades-in-arms. As is well known, they never did have access to those billions which, already before December 1994, were — and still are — in reality lining some other person's bottomless pockets. This act has allowed us to see Dudayev as hundreds of thousands of ordinary Chechen people saw him over that last, long drawn-out year. He will remain in the hearts not only of the Chechens but also of all the sons of the Caucasus, for all times, third in the line of names such as Sheikh Mansur (the Caucasus is indebted to him for strengthening Islam in its moral and spiritual aspects), and Imam Shamil, the embodiment of fortitude and courage. Thanks to him the proud sons of the Caucasus joined the Russian Empire not as slaves — and despite their subjugation they were not broken — but as a people, and accordingly granted respect by that same imperial power.

Now the first President of Chechnya, Dzhokhar Dudayev, qualifies with ease as the third to join their ranks. He has already become for many in the Caucasus the personification of what it is to obtain freedom — but not at any price — a freedom which can be achieved only on the thorny path of justice and mercy and by strongly suppressing in oneself anything that may run counter to all the spiritual commandments and laws we have been granted.

Commenting on the announcement of Dudayev's death, without so much as a blush as the cannonade of Russian guns continued, the President of Russia declared that Dudayev had always rejected finding a peaceful solution, but that regardless, Russia would end the conflict peacefully.

The truth, however, is that Dudayev was eliminated because he sought peace not in empty words but in reality, and was an embarrassment to those with an interest in prolonging this slaughter, which includes, obviously, those directly involved in arranging his murder.

Dzhokhar himself, in conversation with Sergei Dmitriev, remarked on the fact that the Russians found him irksome: 'I am convinced that the Russian authorities would give a lot to have a completely different kind of person in my position. They could crush and win over just about anybody. But not me. Which is why with the help of a line-up of well trained newspapers and Russian TV they are creating an image of me as a "ruthless leader" and "dictator"' ("The Thorny Road to Freedom", page 99, Vilnius 1993).



PHOTO: MASAKI KHOSI

Dudayev's inclination to peace is borne out by the following: he and his comrades-in-arms were killed during a debate by satellite link-up with Konstantin Borovoi in which they were discussing the problems associated with organising the peacemaking process. It is well known that not Dudayev but Russia's leaders created the armed conflict on Chechnya's territory through demonstrably provocative activities which drew into the conflict many thousands of members of the Chechen resistance and the tens of thousands of Russian military servicemen and servicemen from other sectors of the armed forces that they poured into the conflict through their criminal command. Indeed, it was Dudayev who came out most consistently not only as an advocate but also as an initiator and not only of peacemaking but, more broadly, of a negotiating process aimed at establishing mutually advantageous and friendly relations with Russia. Here follows an incomplete chronology of his initiatives and resolutions to this end:

20.03.1992 — a letter to Yeltsin supporting a decision reached at talks in Moscow on the creation of a bilateral joint committee;

03.10.1994 — a letter to Yeltsin regarding the fact that civilian settlements had been subjected to air strikes, and suggesting a meeting in person. This letter begins with the words: 'Dear Boris Nikolaievich, Your active participation in the peacemaking process in the Commonwealth of Independent States gives me hope that what is taking place at the moment in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria is a tragic misunderstanding. It occurs to me that you cannot be in possession of all the information relating to the Chechen Republic, because otherwise it is difficult to evaluate your recent categorical statements that Russia will not use force to solve the Chechen question, as your statements are at variance with the present reality';

29.12.1994 17.35 — 'To the President of the Russian Federation, B. Yeltsin, The



Kremlin, Moscow. Once more I declare and confirm my readiness to personally head negotiations with Russia if they are conducted at the level of Mr. Chernomyrdin. Governmental delegations are available to conduct negotiations at any other level. We are ready to begin negotiating. President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, D. Dudayev';

30.12.1994 — Yet another unanswered appeal from Dudayev to Yeltsin — with the aim of saving civilian lives — calling for the cessation of all military activity on the territory of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria from 20.00 hours on 31.12.94;

11.01.1995 — A statement by Z. Yandarbiyev indicating readiness 'to sign an agreement on a cease-fire';

23.06.1995 — Resolution by the Cabinet of Ministers and signed by D. Dudayev, approving the 'Agreement Protocol' signed on 21.06.95 by a delegation of representatives of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria at the negotiations for a peaceful settlement to the conflict; and commissioning Maskhadov 'to start implementing the portfolio of military issues in conjunction with local authorities';

02.08.1995 — Dudayev's decree, providing a legislative basis for the fulfilment of the 'Agreement' reached between Russia (Russian Federation) and Ichkeria (Chechen Republic) for a peaceful settlement of the military conflict. No such decree was enacted on the Russian side which rendered it impossible to fulfill the signed Agreement, in particular the freeing of the convicted Chechens from the numbers arrested during the conflict.

Dudayev was often blamed for complicity in terrorism — in a war without rules. What is more, he was — and still is — blamed by those who themselves have direct responsibility through their positions for numerous, ongoing acts, and which are classified under international norms as crimes without prescription. When I hear discourse about Yeltsin's aspirations to peace, images come to mind of the Russian army firing on Grozny and, in



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PHOTO. CHRIS HUNTER

the streets, the gnawed bodies of our boys. And, resounding in my ears, I hear people's voices trying to make sense of what, according to Yeltsin, 'restoration of constitutional order' can mean. At the sight of the Russian Minister of internal Affairs, Kulikov\*, I see 'avtozaks' (concentration camps) with people being tortured on 'Kulikovo Field' near a stanitsa, a Cossack village, called Assinovskaya, which I heard about from witnesses who only escaped through a miracle. I see a ditch filled with tortured bodies in the Grozny cemetery, 'Karpinsky barrow'.

At the sight of General Tikhomirov I cannot help recalling Samashki, Sernovodsk, Alkhazurov, Goisky, Shali and many other Chechen towns and villages raped by our army, passing by and through the 'conciliating' process as endorsed by the 'peace and consent' protocol.

It is indisputable that on Russia's side, the authorities, if not instituting genocide, then at least are instituting aggression against the Chechen people — but where is the Chechen retaliation to equal this unbounded aggression? We remember the world's retaliation to Iraq's aggression against the people of Kuwait. We see how Israel reacts to acts of aggression against its citizens by the terrorist 'Hezbollah' organisation, how in retaliating it is not too concerned about the inadmissibility of actions which constitute a threat to the safety and very lives of innocent people, let alone that they are from another sovereign state. But where are the equivalent, systematic acts from Ichkeria? However the events in Budyonnovsk and Kizlyar are regarded, it is impossible to deny that they were a long way off being characteristic of episodes of Chechen resistance. I am not given to idealising the Chechens' treatment of those who find themselves their captives, and freely admit that it is

\* *Translator's note:* the name Kulikov here evokes the historical battle of Kulikovo Field in 1380 when the combined Russian armies defeated the Mongol invaders.

possible that improper acts do take place, but again, this tends to be more the exception than the rule. For this reason, during my five-month stay in the conflict zone, I failed to meet anyone who could have experienced bad treatment in Chechen captivity. Indeed, on the contrary, I know a multitude of cases where the Chechens' treatment of their captives was of the very best. Although the Chechen resistance and the authority by which it is represented are not recognised under international law, their actions conform to this law to an immeasurably greater extent than do those of Russia, which is called upon as a world power to be one of the guarantors of this law. It goes without saying that it is the Chechen people and their culture which merit top honours, but we must not exclude from the reckoning the role of its leaders and thereby, of Dudayev. Yes, his speeches were often somewhat shocking, but the army of which Dudayev was Commander-in-Chief was never a source of shame to the Chechen people, whereas the actions of the armed forces of whom Yeltsin is Commander-in-Chief, have become yet another blemish on the conscience of our Russian people.

I have been to Chechnya many times and know many of those whom General Tikhomirov refers to as the 'criminal authorities', i.e. the numerous Republican leaders who, by and large, hold simultaneous command of sizeable divisions of the Resistance. They are not interested in a battle for power, which they have anyway in the only size and form possible at present — as defined by the conditions of a guerrilla existence — but a battle for 'freedom', i.e. obtaining guarantees sufficient to allow their people a peaceful, safe and dignified existence in perpetuity. These people are fully aware that these guarantees are only attainable through the coming into being and strengthening of their own statehood, i.e. of the appropriate state institutions, of which the first would be the institution of the presidency, if indeed under the present constitution Chechnya is in line for constructing a presidential



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PHOTO: MASAOKI KHOASI

republic. Precisely therefore, however uneasy inter-personal relation between Dudayev and his comrades-in-arms turned out to be during the armed conflict, they never went beyond purely internal frictions at a work level, for anything other than that would have meant the downfall of the cause which they had resolved — not only in word but also in deed — to give their lives to. None of this has changed with Dudayev's death. Whoever it is who acts as President will have authority over all field commanders through the power of the authority invested in this high-ranking post. This is perfectly understood by those who do not want peace, hence their efforts to create an impression of dissension within the leadership of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, hence too their scornful criticism of the address given by Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, the incumbent President of Ichkeria, charging him with unbridled nationalism and intransigent radicalism. With a view to understanding Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev's character and position, I take the liberty of citing the declaration in his letter of 21 December 1994 to the cultural workers of Russia:

'For us, self-determination is not an end in itself but the means by which we can responsibly discharge our duty before Allah and our ancestors, and before those people of different nationalities whose fate is tied to ours; the means we have to resort to, purely because we can see no other mechanism with which to protect ourselves and our land from the residual anti-populist authorities of Russia. Our self-determination, as regards the state, by no means signifies our opposition to the Russian people and the Russian culture to which we have been historically bound by Allah. On the contrary, we are convinced that our self-determination will help the Russian people on their way to spiritual freedom, on the basis of a genuinely fraternal community of all peoples, historically bound to one another. This will help the Russian people overcome the imperial egoism which the authorities have foisted upon them'.





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'That apart, we are entirely aware that self-determination is a sufficiently lengthy process to demand the resolution of many problems between emerging politico-state entities (sides) and, above all, to demand mutual trust. And this is precisely what should be at the forefront of building mutually responsible relations, about which you talk and which here you could help us so very much with.

This does not bear a great resemblance to the ravings of the frenzied chauvinist some would have us see Yandarbiyev as, does it? An obvious conclusion follows from the above: as far as the objective possibility of initiating the peacemaking process is concerned, Dudayev's death changes nothing. The Chechen resistance is still in a state of consolidation and orderliness which is why it is possible to be confident that agreements reached in negotiations with the plenipotentiary representatives of the Resistance, i.e. with the President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria or his representatives, will be strictly upheld by the Chechens, on the sole condition that these agreements are upheld by the Russians as well. The preservation of peace is to us entirely practicable.

In the meantime, I charge the President of Russia's immediate circle and Boris Yeltsin himself with a criminal disinclination to make this peace; I charge the leaders of the countries of the international community with fatally turning a blind eye to Russia's criminal politics; but at the same time, I would like to take this opportunity to offer my sincere condolences to the Chechen people in connection with the death of their first President, Dzhokhar Dudayev. May his memory be blessed and all his sins forgiven. ■

*Translated by Irina TOROPOVA  
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# PEACEMAKERS

*Impressions and observations in the sphere of peacemaking  
in the Russo-Chechen war.*

The war in Chechnya was not inevitable — as it seems to so many today. Indeed, right up to the beginning of the war the vast majority of people in Chechnya believed that it could not possibly happen. But it did. Today, therefore, the main priority for any sensible and rational person who is aware of the realities of the current situation in Chechnya, is to find the answers to a number of questions. Of these, the most important are: is it or is it not possible to stop the war? and who is capable of stopping the war?

One-and-a-half years of war have convinced the people in Chechnya and, probably even in Russia too, that Boris Yeltsin — who has prime responsibility for unleashing this criminal war — and the leaders of the Chechen resistance (Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, Aslan Maskhadov and Shamil Basayev), are incapable of stopping the mindless extermination of people, property, houses and the whole domestic infrastructure of the populace in Chechnya. Thus, the key question is: who is capable of bringing this criminal, inhuman war in Chechnya to an end?

The international community (the UN, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the Council of Europe) through their local representatives, (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the group assisting the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, international humanitarian organisations, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Medecins sans Frontieres, the International Red Cross, and others) are doing a vast amount of work in helping refugees and supplying objective information about what is taking place in Chechnya, and in the governments of member countries of the Council of Europe.

But, regrettably, all this has not yet achieved the desired result. The international community alone is capable of stopping the war — there is no other way. I believe therefore that all the peacemaking organisations working in Chechnya should undertake the following: to work in close co-operation with all the above-mentioned organisations in the war zone and with all the civilian groups and opposing sides, with the aim of bringing them closer to finding consensus. What has the Centre for Peacemaking and Community Development actively been doing in the Russo-Chechen war zone? In my view, it is impossible to overestimate both the significance and the role of the 'pathfinders' — the envoys of the enlightened and democratic West to Chechnya: Christopher Hunter, Patricia Cockrell and their friends. As a citizen of Chechnya I bear witness to the fact that in the early days of the war the civilian populace took heart simply in the knowledge that amongst them were representatives of the Religious Society of Friends — Quakers — from the United Kingdom. At the time, many of us civilians had no specific knowledge of the direction towards which the work of Christopher Hunter, Patricia Cockrell and their friends tended, but as time passed we became convinced of their sincerity and kindness through their persistent, tenacious striving to help the suffering people of Chechnya. And this is all the more astounding, since Russia — which claims constantly that Chechnya is an inalienable part of it — watches indifferently (and foremost amongst those watching are Russians) as servicemen in their prime and civilians on both sides lose their lives.

Overtime, Shaman Adayev, Zainap Gashaeva, Maya Shovkhalova and I joined Christopher Hunter's peacemaking group. It is very important that victims of the Russo-Chechen war, and here I mean Shaman, Zainap, Maya and myself, now have the opportunity to make a contribution, albeit a small one, to bringing peace closer to the ancient earth of the Caucasus. It is my personal belief that it is very important to be able to evaluate events in our country from the perspective of the world outlook of our Western friends. I am struck by their good sense, their reasonableness, their pragmatism and, particularly, their enormous capacity for work and determination. When I am with them, I constantly find myself thinking how unsystematic our work is, and how unused we are to routine and heavy work. But we are learning. I used to think that it was only worth pursuing things that would bring about rapid results. It was the war, unfortunately, that convinced me of the rightness of our English friends' reasoning that there are no quick solutions to the problem of Russo-Chechen relations. It is this conviction — and I really am convinced — which gives me the confidence and strength to work with Christopher, Patricia, Shaman, Zainap, Maya and Oleg in the peacemaking group.

In western Chechnya, especially in Sernovodsk, Samashki, Orekhovo and Assinovskaya, Christopher Hunter's group is held in tremendous respect; I find it easy therefore to work in the group. The refugees believe us, and try to help us obtain objective information about those who went through the hell of the filtration camps, and the terror of occupation in those first days when Sernovodsk, Samashki, Assinovskaya and other Chechen towns and villages were seized. It was precisely in those first days that horrible crimes were committed. Officials from Ingushetia and the pro-Moscow administration in Grozny willingly make contact with our peacemaking group, because they know that our activities cannot be construed as political engagement — we are on the side of peace and justice. I consider, therefore, that our contact with the President of Ingushetia's Head of Administration, Askhab Goigov, and with the leaders of the Chechen and Ingush urban areas and regions is a very good thing.



Valery Schekoldin



PHOTO: MASAOKI KHOAS

In my view, it is also very important to establish contact with other international organisations, in the first instance with those like the IOM, Medecins sans Frontieres, and the International Red Cross. Our co-operation helps both us and them, since we give them access to the latest information and expose the sources of massive human rights violations in this or that Chechen region. During my meetings with non-governmental organisations in Chechnya, with discrete groups and with ordinary individuals, I constantly draw attention to the theme of non-violent settlement of disagreements, including the question of Chechnya's status and the interrelation of Russia and Chechnya. I cite as examples Quebec (Canada), Northern Ireland (United Kingdom), Palestine and Israel and try to show that armed conflict is the most foolish and pernicious route to take. Civilisation has long since devised the instruments for peaceful settlement of any conflict (the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and their division, and Chechnya and Ingushetia, etc.).

The political negotiation process is difficult; it is laborious and monotonous, but it is the most shrewd and efficient way of solving conflict. Here I blame Russia for its unwillingness to maintain political dialogue with the Chechen leadership in 1991, '92, '93 and '94. Russia has always played the hypocrite, treacherously blaming the Chechens for every mortal sin (drug dealing, counterfeiting money, falsifying 'avisos' (promissory notes), the rise in other crimes, etc.). Russia itself is a hotbed of crime. However, I explain to the Chechen people that in Russia there are still true democrats and forces who are fighting against the war (in the mass media there are many: the Moscow News, the Independent Gazette, Izvestia, Sergei Kovalev, Grigory Yavlinsky, Yegor Gaidar, Valeriya Novodvorskaya and others).

I consider it very important to convince the Chechens that not everyone in Russia wishes us ill, and that in Russia we do have friends! There are, in my view, about 10 to 15 thousand Chechen men actively participating in the war, i.e. soldiers and officers of the regular Chechen army. As for the rest of the population — especially those who would never consider giving in to the suppression of



PHOTO: CHRIS HUNTER

freedom, despite Russia's colossal military might — I think our peacemaking group should involve them more actively within the sphere of activities of all the peacemaking groups working in Chechnya. Why do I say 'especially those who would never consider giving in to the suppression of freedom'? It is precisely this sector of the population which, in the future, could once more provoke armed conflict between Russia and Chechnya. Even if they themselves do not take part in the fighting, there is a danger that these people will bring up their children to hate Russia, and pass on the concept of military confrontation. This is a great danger for Russia and Chechnya alike, but for the Chechens it would be all the more so, since in the event of a repetition of the war between Russia and Chechnya the question of Chechnya's physical existence as a nation may arise.

I suggest, therefore, that our peacemaking group and all the peacemakers in other organisations should direct their efforts to persuading the entire Chechen population that the world does have tried and tested ways of resolving this kind of conflict and war. The Chechens have a proverb: 'Any war, no matter how long, will always end in peace'. So, in the arena of the political resolution of Russia and Chechnya's interrelation, in which a profound knowledge of law, economics, history and ethnography will be needed, we will defeat the neo-imperialist forces which now have Boris Yeltsin under their thumb. In this sphere, where victory or defeat will be determined by a keen intellect — not brute force — this is where we will prove to Russia our truth and rights, because on the side of the Chechens, who are currently fighting and dying for their freedom, are the forces of good and the whole civilised world. ■

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## THE WAR IN CHECHNYA — PATH TOWARDS PEACE

"Life is the greatest treasure on earth. Nobody can deny a person's right to life. It is guaranteed by all national and international laws. The war in Chechnya has denied and continues to deny the right to life of thousands of people and deprives hundreds of thousands of people of their homes, property and happiness. The war must be stopped by any peaceful means". Statement of the March for Life and Compassion, Moscow-Grozny.

Before and during the outbreak of war in Chechnya, I was in the North Caucasian republics of North Ossetia and Ingushetia to plan conflict resolution seminars for young people from the two republics. I saw the major build-up of military personnel, equipment and vehicles in Ingushetia and North Ossetia during the first two weeks of December 1994. This was even before Russian Defence minister Pavel Grachev and Chechen president Djokhar Dudayev met in Vladikavkaz and Sleptsovskaya to try and negotiate a settlement to avoid armed conflict. Evidently, Russia's policy to attack with force had at that time already been determined.

What followed was the fiercest bombing and destruction witnessed in Europe since the second world war. Five weeks later, the centre of Grozny and many outlying areas had been reduced to ruins. Tens of thousands of people were buried beneath the rubble.

Since the war began, there have been people in Russia and Chechnya have been protesting and repeatedly demanding peace. At the beginning, the protests were frequent and well publicized. During the first two months of war demonstrations were held throughout Russia. Prominent politicians joined with peace and human rights activists and a large section of the general public to denounce the military operations. But as people saw their voices of protest fall on deaf ears among Russia's leaders, the numbers calling for peace on the streets dwindled to a few, even in centre of the capital Moscow. The number of protestors from the beginning was never large; the largest demonstration was unable to fill Pushkin square. This may have been due in part to the anti-Caucasian and especially anti-Chechen propaganda which had been circulating in the Russian media for several years previously. Despite this, a core group of people from Chechnya, Russia and beyond have defied the general mood of apathy and committed themselves to trying to stop the war and build peace. They are a minority, but a vocal one. The opposition to their aims and efforts by the Russian authorities was massive. Working against such a huge bureaucracy and power inevitably meant placing their own lives under threat. This was not enough however to stop them from standing up to what they thought was right. The following is an account to describe some of their efforts. Now, nearly two years since the war began, the remaining Russian troops are leaving Chechnya. 70% of the Russian population supports this, according to a recent opinion poll.

My reason for getting involved in working to help end this war and support its victims, is simple. As a Quaker, I am convinced of the presence of God, or of something sacred, in everyone. To harm or destroy others is to do the same to that Divine spirit within them. In Chechnya, thousands of people were being destroyed — Chechens, Russians and other nationalities; civilians and military. I felt called to stand up against such inhumanity. If we treasure that which is sacred within us, how can we quietly watch other people being stripped of all rights — even the right to live? How can we create a more compassionate world if we do not defend their rights? I found other people, of many nationalities, working with similar convictions and aims. Many of us joined our efforts and carried



out the efforts described below. The work is still continuing today, but with new challenges and new possibilities in the post-war situation in Chechnya and surrounding areas in the North Caucasus.

We cannot tell what effect our efforts had on ending the war. But millions in Russia and abroad, heard our 'no' to the gross inhumanity of war through wide media coverage. In Chechnya, people have valued our efforts, and many are interested to continue working for peace and to alleviate suffering. They have taken on some of our experience and know-how, creating their own NGOs. We are now helping them to network with NGOs in Russia and abroad to broaden their support and to help break their sense of isolation. Such work is contributing to the creation of a civil society. Such efforts, if encouraged and supported, may play an important role in creating a lasting peace in the region, to break the cycles of violence which have existed for many years. Representatives of Russian NGOs who have understood their Chechen counterparts and built relations founded on respect and trust, are also playing an important role in strengthening the civil society, in Chechnya and in Russia as a whole. Such work is an all too rare counter-part to the mistrust and hatred which has grown from the brutality of the war, and the unjust, often cruel treatment of Chechens in the Russian Federation.

For its part, the Centre for Peacemaking and Community Development is working to support NGOs and the victims of violence in Russia and the North Caucasus in particular. Through its activities, the Centre strives to promote and facilitate work for peace and reconciliation. Its centres in Moscow and Chechnya rely on highly dedicated individuals from those places. Their work to highlight the inhumanity of the war has been courageous and tireless. Much of this work has fallen on the shoulders of Zainap and Maya, Alaudin, Shaman and Adlan, Toita and Fatima from Chechnya; Lisa, Tamerlan and Mariam from Ingushetia; Oleg, Sergei, Misha and Galina from Moscow and many others from various regions and countries. Important work has and is being carried out by other NGOs in these places, including women's, youth, peacemaking and human rights groups.



Valery SCHEKOLDIN



PHOTO, "NIPPONZAN MYOKHODZH"

In October 1994 I was in Grozny for the first time as part of a small delegation of Russian and international peace groups. The other groups included the Committee of Soldier's Mothers of Russia, Nonviolence International and the Russian human rights society 'Omega'. The main aim of the visit was to search for ways to prevent an escalation of violence in Chechnya. Members of our delegation had identified points of agreement between the Chechen leaders and Russian backed Chechen opposition groups which could be used to bring them together to work for a peaceful resolution to the brewing civil conflict. Unfortunately some members of our group were suspected of spying for the Russian authorities and the delegation was asked to leave the republic before it could meet with all the necessary people. At that time, suspicion of groups coming from Russia was widespread in the republic. Aware of the tensions in the Chechnya and recognizing the possibility of an escalation of the conflict and of bloodshed on a large scale, our group strongly recommended in an open statement to Russian leaders that Russian troops not be sent into Chechnya.

Generally, work undertaken to reduce tensions in Chechnya and explore ways of preventing conflict was minimal if not negligible, though there were many signs that some form of armed conflict was imminent. International organizations such as the OSCE arrived only after several months of warfare. Talks between the Russian and Chechen leadership were conducted only at the last minute before the war broke out and they were not substantive. Talks on the central question of the status of Chechnya could have born fruit. Dudayev, though having issued threats to the Russian leadership, told a delegation of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) in December 1994 that he was ready to negotiate with Russian leaders on the issue of Chechnya's sovereignty. Russia's president Boris Yeltsin did not respond to his requests for dialogue.

Russia's invasion was staged in order to end three years of self-declared Chechen independence, to 'preserve the unity of the Russian Federation' and to 'restore constitutional order' in the tiny enclave of Chechnya, home to around 1 million people of Chechen, Russian and other nationalities.

War was and remains in the interests of many of Russia's military leaders and power structures. It began at a time when the huge Russian army was in decline through underfunding and thousands of officers returning from East Germany were idle and without flats to live in. Billions of dollars have been invested in the war. An article in a daily Russian newspaper reported that a day of war in Chechnya was equal to Russia's education budget for a whole year. The war has largely been funded by western tax-payers through the International Monetary Fund. Homeless officers reluctant to serve in Chechnya were told that unless they served, they would not be given living accommodation in Russia. The above factors proved to be decisive in determining Russian policy in Chechnya. They were more convincing to the Russian leadership than demands from democrats such as Sergei Kovalyov and Yegor Gaidar and many Russian citizens, though not actively expressed, to prevent war and respect human rights.

Another factor widely seen as a main cause of the war is oil. Russia's leaders are striving to reap the benefits of rich oil supplies from Azerbaijan and are interested to see the oil run through their territory, rather than along proposed routes through other states. The Russian pipeline runs through Grozny. A diversion of the pipeline around Chechnya would undoubtedly have cost far less than the colossal costs of the war.

I spoke with Ingush villagers in December 1994 who took to the streets to block the way of federal tanks and armoured personnel carriers on their way through Ingushetia to Chechnya. In one village the Ingush minister of health was beaten to death by Russian soldiers. Other civilians were killed and injured, but people in the villages were determined not to let the military convoys through. In a village near the Chechen/Ingush border, a Russian general stopped his troops and ordered them back. He was shown on television around the world walking among the horrified villagers, assuring them that he was not going to obey orders to attack them, whom he regarded as his own people. In another village, tanks and armoured personnel carriers were reportedly stopped by villagers.



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There the soldiers, who had no desire to attack let alone be there, showed villagers how to demobilize their vehicles by pulling out certain pipes. There was hope that more such cases of refused orders might bring the whole military operation to a halt, but the ruthlessness of the military leadership was not to be deterred. 12 December 1994, the Russian army invaded Grozny, home to around 400,000 people, stating that the operation would last only a few hours. The Russian leadership did not and has not since announced war nor a state of emergency in Chechnya.

Thousands of young, unprepared and confused young Russian conscripts were sent to Grozny from the North, East and West. Many who entered Chechnya from Dagestan had no maps, never mind knowledge of how best to take Grozny. They gave themselves up as prisoners immediately when villagers stopped them by standing in the roads. Many of the young conscripts had been sent to Chechnya with no knowledge of where they were going or what was awaiting them.

During the first weeks of the war thousands of conscript soldiers were sent to their death in the streets of Grozny. They fell as victims of an unannounced, unprepared and fully disorganized war. Many of the soldiers who fell in Grozny died as a result of battles between various uncoordinated Russian military units. Cases were reported of Russian troops fighting against each other for hours before realizing that their guns were positioned against their own. On New Year's night alone, according to Russian military sources, around 2000 Russian soldiers lost their lives in battle; more than the official figure for the whole duration of the war. At least a thousand of them were left lying on the streets for up to 2 months, rotting and eaten by packs of hungry dogs. Chechen chief commander Aslan Maskhadov repeatedly appealed for a cease-fire to give the Russians time to clear away their corpses. It was refused each time.

A few weeks into the war, it was clear that the Chechen men defending their homeland, few in number but well-disciplined, were going to be no push-over even for the Russian army. The humiliation and rage of the Russian generals following heavy losses led to over a year and a half of genocidal action against the Chechen people, the destruction of Grozny and the movement west and south of Russian forces towards the mountain communities. Most villages from Samashki and Gudermes southwards have been destroyed and damaged. Some have undergone attack several times.

Some criminal acts against Russians living in Chechnya took place during Dudayev's leadership before the war, though there is no evidence that such actions were conducted or sanctioned by the leadership itself. The majority of Russians left Chechnya while Doku Zavgayev was still head of the Chechen-Ingush Republic's Supreme Soviet before Dudayev came to power. Human rights abuses and criminal acts committed in Chechnya during the three years of self-declared independence before the war now look minor compared to the mass violations committed by Russian forces in Chechnya since December 1994. The inhabitants of Grozny were fully unprepared for the scale of the federal attack. Many Chechens had left the city to their relatives in the villages. The Russian population, which dominated central districts, largely remained however, perhaps feeling there was nothing to fear from their own army. Tens of thousands of civilians were killed in Grozny during the following weeks, according to the Russian human rights organization 'Memorial'. They were mostly Russians. Many lived for weeks during the bombardment in cellars with their neighbours, almost without food and water. If any means of sustenance was brought to them during this time, it was usually by Chechens who were ready to risk their lives to bring them much needed relief supplies. One such person was Shaman from Sernovodsk, who filled his old Lada with bread, drove to Grozny and braved the heavy firing to deliver it to people in basements.

As the war progressed and ever fewer people gathered to protest it in Russia, a little-noticed pilgrimage was going on. Dozens of mothers from Russia were travelling to Chechnya to try to rescue their sons from the horror and misery of the war. Chechnya's capital had been destroyed and the bombing was continuing in the villages.

The idea for a peace march to Grozny was conceived at the international congress of the Committee of Soldier's Mothers in Moscow in February. It was inspired by the compassion of Russian mothers and of the Chechen women who worked closely alongside them. Russian and Chechen women expressed what they had seen in Chechnya and called for an immediate end to the war. After the demonstrations in Russia and appeals to politicians for the killing to stop had been ignored, the women and several peace groups decided to march into Chechnya to try to stop the war themselves. The few dozen Russian soldier's mothers and others were joined, from the Chechen border onwards, by hundreds of Chechen women.

In the Caucasus there is a tradition that if women enter a zone of war and wave white cloths, the men must lay down their arms. Russian mothers collected signatures on white cloths from towns throughout Russia with thousands of signatures, calling for an end to the war. The Quaker office in Moscow became a co-ordination centre for the peace march and informed peace and women's groups all over the world of the women's activities. Groups from abroad also sent white cloths with signatures supporting the peace witness in Chechnya.

The march for peace began in Moscow on 8 March 1995, international women's day. At the end of the month we entered Chechnya. We were welcomed by hundreds of villagers lining the streets of the border town Sernovodsk. Many people were in tears, seeing the march as a sign of hope after months of bombing and many civilian deaths. We could hear bombs and artillery fire on a village not far to the South. The pledge of the march, signed by each of the hundreds of marchers, was read out; "...I hope that my commitment to this march will help stop further killing and the great suffering and tragedy of people in Chechnya... I pledge not to resort to any form of violence, even for my own defence. I believe in the presence of goodness and the power of compassion in everyone".



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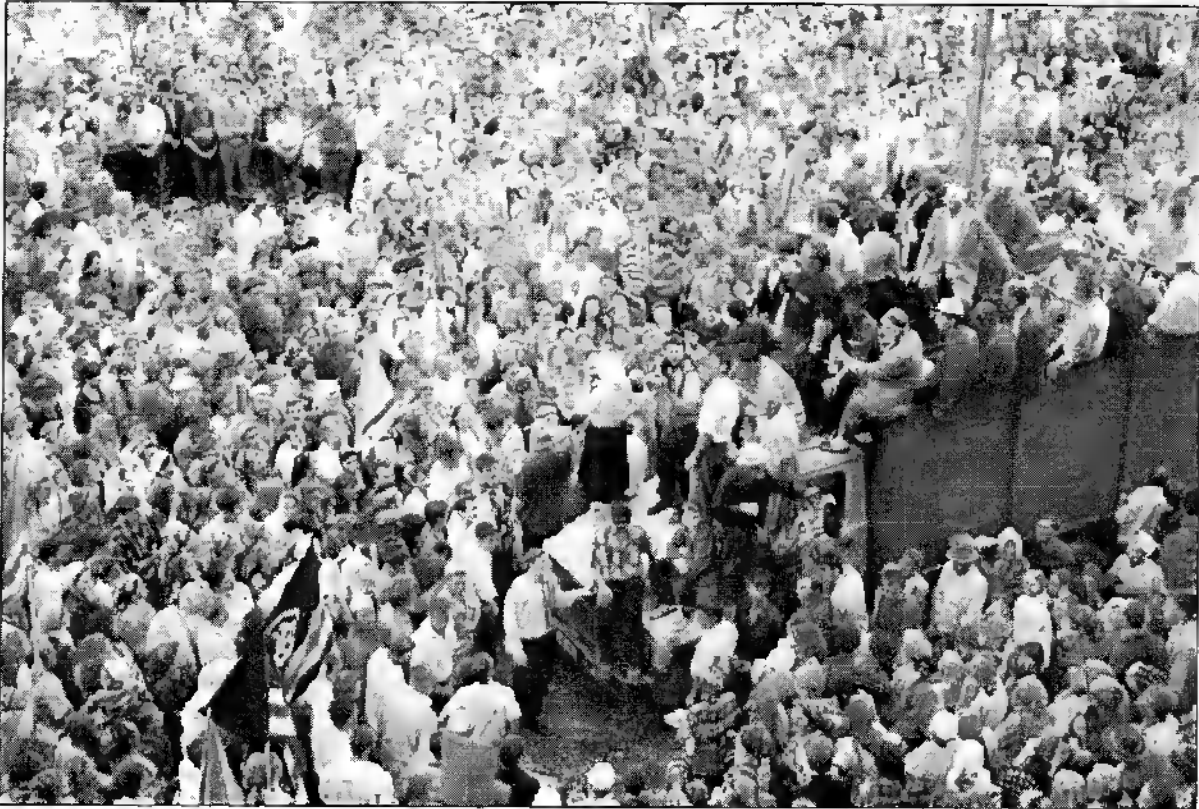


PHOTO: CHRIS HUNTER

Having been invited to spend our first night in Chechnya in local people's homes, we set off again the following morning with numbers significantly increased. Buddhist monks chanted and drummed, women sang prayers to Allah in the local vainakh language. 8 kilometres along the road we were stopped and delayed for an hour at a Russian military checkpoint. Marchers, particularly the Russian mothers, visited the 'barracks' and trenches and spoke to Russian soldiers. Russian and Chechen women gave them chocolate, gratefully received. Some mothers received information to help them search for their sons. The young conscripts were nervous, wanting to go home. Like the villagers, they too had awaited the mother's march with the hope for an end to the senseless suffering.

We walked on to the village of Samashki. We were again greeted warmly by villagers who brought us warm bread and salt. We were invited to stay the night there, but were awaited in the next village Achkoi Martan. By this time, news of the march had spread to surrounding areas of Chechnya. Women from other villages travelled in cars and buses to join us. That evening we were again stopped at a military checkpoint. This time the commander was not open to negotiation. We waited for five hours. Meanwhile it became dark and we were surrounded by a ring of soldiers. Russian mothers showed pictures of their sons to Chechen mothers and learned of the horrors experienced by families caught in the attacks by Russian forces. We spoke to bewildered Russian conscripts surrounding us, some as young as 17 years old.

Towards midnight, heavily armed special forces surrounded us and forced everyone into buses. The Buddhist monks and a few mothers were kept in a filtration camp overnight. In such filtration camps Chechen fighters are supposedly 'filtered out' from other Chechen men — effectively an impossible task. Thousands of Chechen have been through such camps, picked up indiscriminately from their streets or homes and usually tortured or beaten. One of the Chechen men accompanying the march was held for several days. Russian, Chechen and Ingush women campaigned for his release. When they met him he was black with bruises. He showed the women points on his tongue and ears where he had been given electric shocks. There remain today 1500 missing



A START OF THE MOTHERS' MARCH OF COMPASSION PHOTO, "NIPPODNZAN MYDKHODZHI"

people from Chechnya — mainly men who went through the filtration camps. Russian authorities either refuse to comment on their whereabouts or announce that they are all dead. Relatives believe that many are still alive, kept in prisons throughout Russia and are campaigning to get them freed. The Chechens regularly demand their release in exchange for Russian prisoners of war still being held.

Two weeks after we passed through Samashki, federal forces massacred civilians there. Chechen women walked to the village from Sernovodsk and filmed the aftermath, three days before the press and the International Cross were allowed in. The material was shown on Russian national television. I entered the village a few days later, hidden with two scholars from the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies in the back of a jeep packed with Chechen women. Women, children and old people were shot by Russian contract soldiers, others burned alive in their basements. Shortly afterwards I attended a congress in Sernovodsk to establish a Chechen women's movement to work for peace and record other such human rights violations throughout Chechnya.

Inhabitants in Samashki reported the indiscriminate shooting and killing of people on the streets. Artillery and rocket attacks were launched on the village at night. During the second day of the attack Russian forces drove along six streets of the village throwing explosive devices into houses and basements, killing civilians. Eyewitnesses report that Russian soldiers demanded that men leave their houses and basements. Some were shot on the spot. Others were made to undress and run along the streets — particularly humiliating for Muslims. Dozens of men were thus rounded up and taken to filtration camps. The team of Russian human rights commissioner Sergei Kovalyov compiled a list of over 500 men missing from Samashki shortly after the attack.

One woman told me how soldiers had thrown her seven year old son before a moving armoured personnel carrier. After it had run over him, the women was forced to pick up the body. They poured petrol into her house nearby and ordered her to set light to it. She couldn't do this, so the soldiers fired into the house which burst into flames.

The massacre of civilians in Samashki in 1995 was a particularly brutal and deplorable act of violence. The events there received more attention than other such occurrences in Chechnya, mainly because human rights and peace groups and journalists were witnesses to the aftermath of the attack. Other such atrocities have and still are taking place all over Chechnya but generally little information is dispersed about them.

On 21 April 1995, a group of 100 peace marchers finally marched through the ruins which had once been the centre of Grozny. Few people had remained and the atmosphere was grim. We walked along the cratered central boulevard, joined by local people for a public meeting in the central 'freedom square'. "Thank you for coming", an old Russian man said, tears in his eyes. The final stage of the march, like earlier stages, was shown on television news in Russia and in some other European countries. Although the war was not stopped, as some of the demonstrators had hoped, the desperate human conditions in Chechnya had been brought to the attention of millions of people, and thereby our call for an end to the war had been heard. The march was the only large-scale anti-war effort since Russian forces entered Chechnya in December 1994. People of all nationalities in Chechnya who had met with the marchers, civilians and soldiers, at least knew they had not been forgotten.

Large peaceful demonstrations took place in the centre of Grozny in February 1996. Thousands of demonstrators described by some Russian news commentators as "violent" and "extremist" Dudayev supporters thronged the city for a week. I visited the demonstration on 9 February and met teachers, doctors, mullahs and others who were able to articulate their demands for peace and independence in a balanced and coherent way. Driven by the year of destruction at the hands of Russian forces and the lack of response from Russia and abroad, they wanted to express their demands for peace and independence — and to do so peacefully. Despite these sentiments, Russian-backed Chechen OMON troops blockaded the centre of the city where the demonstrations took place, and on February 9, shells were fired from a nearby building on the protestors, killing two and seriously injuring five. Later Russian troops and OMON personnel attacked using tear gas and opening fire, killing a mother and her child who were passing by, and several more. Such demonstrations are still held regularly in Grozny and throughout Chechnya.

Inhabitants of Sernovodsk ran a peace camp for six months during the six harsh winter months of 1995 when their town was blockaded by Russian troops. Town folk remained at the camp near the Russian checkpoint on a main road leading out of the town 24 hours a day. There they prayed, fasted, danced powerful prayer rituals and shared information about recent developments. I found the determination and energy of the people there inspiring. They did not look upon the young Russian soldiers standing a little further along the road as enemies. I was told of numerous cases when soldiers had approached women at the camps for food. "Of course we gave it to them", I was told. "What would their mothers do if they saw them now standing hungry, in worn-out clothes in the cold?"

The main aim of the demonstrators was to lift the blockade around their town. Active members of the peace camp looked bitterly disappointed when they arrived on buses in Sleptsovskaya having fled the bombing in Sernovodsk. "We stood for so long to prevent this from happening", said one woman I had met in November. Her spirit was not broken however. Such military actions only fuel people's anger at the Russian forces and increase people's will to become independent.

In March 1996 Samashki again suffered a major attack by federal forces. This time the whole village was pounded by Russian guns for over a week. Thousands of civilians were trapped inside; many were killed. Few buildings remained standing. Inhabitants from Samashki fled to the neighbouring village of Sernovodsk during the attack in 1995. Shortly before the recent attack on Samashki, Sernovodsk was also bombed for a whole week following a six month blockade by federal troops around the village.



CHRIS HUNTER DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRE FOR PEACEMAKING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT. PHOTO: COLIN HUNTER

My work with local NGOs from Russia and Chechnya for peace has included gathering information on such events in Chechnya. We have sent this out through the Internet to peace, religious and human rights organizations, the press, governments and inter-governmental organizations around the world. Through working together in this way we have been able to raise the awareness of the realities of the war experienced by people in Chechnya. This helps to break the isolation felt by many people in Chechnya following over a year of hostile warfare which has attracted almost no response from the international community. In a recent report on Chechnya, the international humanitarian organization 'Medecins Sans Frontieres' (MSF) states that the targetting of civilians and the systematic flattening of villages by Russian forces have made the conflict in Chechnya "the world's cruellest war". MSF called on the G7 countries to push Russia to end the "massacre and destruction", to respect human rights and allow aid agencies access to civilians, which has been repeatedly refused. MSF also urged them to bolster the presence of international observers in Chechnya.

Work with NGOs in Chechnya and Russia has also included providing a link and contact between local groups here and international NGOs. Such links have enabled the exchange of experience, materials and the passing on of information and expertise. Links have been strengthened by representatives of Russian and Chechen NGOs travelling abroad to talk about their work and the situation in their country and by people from abroad coming to Russia and Chechnya to see the situation for themselves.

I organized a visit to Geneva in July 1995 for two Russian soldier's mothers and two Chechen women. We met with various United Nations bodies and with NGOs to talk about the human rights situation in Chechnya and Russia. The soldier's mothers talked also of the poor conditions in the Russian army. We testified before the UN human rights committee shortly before it met to discuss the report of the Russian Federation on human rights which is submitted once every four years. We highlighted the events which took place in Samashki in April of that year and other such cases.

A speaking tour for two soldier's mothers and two Chechen women to eight European countries took place in June 1996, organized by War Resisters International and the Quaker centres in

Moscow and Brussels. The main aim of the visits was to raise awareness of what was happening in Chechnya and Russia and to find ways to combine efforts in Russia, Chechnya and abroad to stop the war. Peace groups in each country were responsible for the programme there, which included meetings with NGOs, the press, the public and politicians. I visited Brussels with two of the women to meet with members of the European parliament and the Council of Europe, as well as Paris and London.

In April the Centre for Peacemaking and the Buddhist order 'Nipponzan Myohodji' organized an international delegation of NGOs to Chechnya and Ingushetia. We were able to provide members of the delegation with the opportunity to see what is going on in the region for themselves by meeting with Chechen and Russian NGOs, local people, refugees, politicians, military representatives, refugees and international organizations based locally. The members of the delegation were able to form links with local groups and report back to their home communities and governments. Russia's membership of the Council of Europe and its signatories to international conventions and agreements on human rights means that the war in Chechnya is not an internal matter of the Russian Federation but a responsibility of governments and people everywhere.

We plan shortly to hold a seminar for people working locally in Chechnya and surrounding republics to increase awareness about how to effectively provide information on human rights violations. Experts from Russia and abroad will share information on national and human rights mechanisms and how to collect and document information in a way that is acceptable to the relevant institutions. We are setting up centres in Grozny and other regions of the North Caucasus where such information will be collected and distributed. The information on human rights abuses which we collected throughout the war has been used and published by various Russian and international bodies (the UN human rights' commission, Amnesty International, etc.) and newspapers/magazines.

Tensions in the North Caucasus are not limited to the Chechen republic. Other conflicts in the region are related to the situation there and could be ignited if the war escalates further. My colleague in Moscow Patricia Cockrell and I, together with two guest experts from western Europe, organized a seminar for young people from the two North Caucasian republics of North Ossetia and Ingushetia in 1995. We explored nonviolent approaches to conflict resolution through workshops and games. Some people were nervous and reluctant at the beginning, not having had contact with people generally and even friends from the other republic since the war in 1992. After living together for a few days in a sanatorium in Nalchik, the atmosphere relaxed and people were able to listen to each other's fears, hurts and problems. Many returned home to share their experiences with local press and television. Friendships and contacts made during that time have been continued and other such meetings have taken place since.

In Chechnya, dozens of political parties, women's groups, youth groups, anti-war groups and other NGOs have been established. Their common goal is an end to the bloodshed and lasting peace in Chechnya. People in Chechnya are tired and worn down by months of killing and destruction. Many, who are unable to look beyond each day, are experiencing what has been described as a 'syndrome of fatigue'. Nevertheless the energy and determination at the regular peace marches and peace camps is strong. Now that the situation is more peaceful in Chechnya, their focus has changed to re-building their society from the ruins of their republic. They are trying to free educational establishments from the remaining Russian troops, to provide help to children who suffered in the war and to help feed and clothe the many people who have been left in poverty from the war. Psychologically, this post-war phase has many signs of being tougher than the time of war itself. War has left behind ruins and grief. No town has escaped destruction. Chechen president Zemelkhan Yanderbiev said that it would cost \$150 billion to reconstruct the republic, riddled as it is with bomb craters from one end to the other. It is not likely that Russia, which is unable to pay the salaries of its own teachers, miners and soldiers, is going to foot the bill.



In Moscow representatives of NGOs, political parties and movements signed a joint agreement in January 1995 *"on joint action in defence of freedom, against bloodshed in Chechnya"*. The statement was a reaction to the crisis in Pervomaiskaya which *"condemned the terrorist methods used in the war, by whichever side they may have been committed and which have already led to the deaths of tens of thousands of peaceful citizens... We recall the warnings of sober-minded politicians and human rights activists voiced from the very beginning of the war, of such inevitable consequences to the forceful solution of the conflict... We are certain that brutality gives birth to terrorism. We consider the best means of avoiding similar actions to be the immediate resumption of the aborted talks in Chechnya on military and political questions, however hard and long the process may be"*.

An international social tribunal has been set up by Russian NGOs and deputies of the State Duma, initiated by a public investigation committee of the NGO "Glasnost". The tribunal, which will judge the actions of *"high-ranking Russian officials guilty of starting the war in Chechnya"* will consider evidence which is being provided by witnesses and will *"be capable of assessing the moral and political responsibility of those who started the war"* (S.Grigoriant). Such a tribunal is necessary, under the auspices of the international community, for those on both sides responsible for starting the war to be brought to justice. This will allow people in Chechnya and Russia to be free in this knowledge to get on with their lives in peace.

The work to stop the war and support its victims carried out by NGOs in Russia and Chechnya has been courageous and extensive, though often carried out by relatively few people in extremely difficult circumstances. International support for those people working to bring about peace both in Russia and Chechnya is vital. The peace march to Grozny and other initiatives for peace in Chechnya provide a powerful response by brave individuals to the deplorable activities there. But Russia's top leaders remain unmoved and are preoccupied with holding on to their power. A combined effort of Russian politicians and groups of citizens committed to building lasting peace in Russia and the North Caucasus, together with international support on both governmental and non-governmental levels, could break the cycle of violence which has repeatedly devastated that region over many years. If Russia does not take on its responsibility to compensate for the enormous damage it has caused in Chechnya, at least it should allow and encourage other countries to help reconstruct the republic, rather than preventing them from doing so.

In 1854, the Indian Chief Seattle sent a letter to the president of the United States on the USA's plans to buy his people's land and find them a reservation to live on. The Chechens fought the Russian troops which came to take their land as their forefathers had repeatedly done before. They have adopted the modern technology of this age. But there are parallels with the Indians living in the United States, whose respect and love for their land, their forefathers and their children was central to their existence. The imperialist habits of the world's most powerful countries are also comparable. "...We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One portion of land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs. The earth is not his brother, but his enemy, and when he has conquered it, he moves on. He leaves his father's graves behind, and he does not care. His father's grave, and his children's birthright are forgotten. He treats his mother, the earth, and his brother, the sky, as things to be bought, plundered, sold like sheep or bright beads. His appetite will devour the earth and leave behind only desert. I do not know. Our ways are different from yours...."

Basic respect for and understanding of all people and all peoples, however small, are essential preconditions for peace, be it in the Caucasus or any other part of the world.

Having made many friendships with people in Chechnya and Russia who are effected by this war, the regular pictures of its victims for me are not merely images of people in yet another distant conflict. They are real and close. I have learnt that peace in their lands, just as peace in Bosnia, Lebanon, Rwanda and all other places of war, is indivisible from peace in the world — and peace in my heart.